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A CAVEAT against

IN FIDELITY:

OR,

The DANGER of

APOSTASY

FROM THE

Christian Faith:

WITH

An ANSWER to various QUERIES
concerning the Salvation of the *Heathens*, and
the Hope of the modern *Deists*, upon their
Pretences to Sincerity.

By I. WATTS, D. D.

John iii. 36. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting Life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see Life, but the Wrath of God abideth on him.*

Heb. x. 26. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful Expectation of Judgment.*

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THE
P R E F A C E.

T WAS in the Year 1722.
these Discourses were com-
posed, and they have lain
several Years by me waiting for a
more proper Opportunity to be sent
into the World. But Deism and In-
fidelity having made such violent Ef-
forts of late in this Nation, and ha-
ving obtained such unhappy Success,
as to draw away some from the Faith
of the blessed Gospel, and to stagger
others in their Belief, I thought Pro-
vidence forbid any longer Delay, and
called me to add this Attempt toward
the Restraint of a spreading Pestilence.

It has not been my Business and Intent here to produce the numerous Train of Arguments, whereby the Christian Religion is supported, and set them in a fair array. This has been done in many Forms, and in many Volumes by Writers of the first Rank in our Age, which are sufficiently known in the World, and received with just Honour.

Yet I take Pleasure on this Occasion to point out to my Reader two lesser Writings lately published, which are worthy of his Perusal. The first is the Lord Bishop of *London's Pastoral Letter*, written in Defence of Christianity, wherein he has drawn into a narrow and comprehensive View some of the most considerable Arguments for the Vindication of our holy Religion; and by exhibiting them in a just and perspicuous Manner, he has recommended them to the Christian World.

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World. The other is Dr. *William Harris's* Two Discourses, wherein the *Reasonableness of believing* the Gospel, and the *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*, are displayed in a convincing Light. I could wish that Believers and Infidels would read these little Books with a serious Spirit.

There are two Sorts of Persons in our Age, who have not only Need to have the Evidences of our holy Religion set before them in their fullest View, but it may also be very proper to excite them to a diligent, faithful, and religious Attention to these Evidences, by representing the formidable and tremendous Threatnings of God, against those who abuse the Light they enjoy, and become Infidels or Apostates in the midst of divine Advantages for Faith. Happy should I be if I could impress their Souls with a solemn Concern and Sollicitude, equal to the vast and infinite Importance of the Subject. The

The one Sort of Men have declared themselves *Unbelievers* of the Gospel of *Christ*: They have gone so far as to renounce the Scriptures, and forsake Christianity: Some of these set themselves to oppose it boldly by such Assaults either of Wit or Argument, as Nature hath furnish'd them with; and some join their Attempts of Reason and Raillery together: May God recover them by his almighty Grace! I fear there is but little Prospect of recalling them to the Faith, by any thing we can speak or write.

There are others who have not abandon'd the Gospel, yet have had their Minds so corrupted and perplexed by some Objections of Infidelity, that they are reduced to a doubting State, *Whether the Religion of Christ be divine or no*, and are seeking after some Determination by fuller Evidence. I do not call these Persons *Deists* or *Infidels*:

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fidels: I hope as well as pray for their Establishment in the Faith of *Jesus* the only Saviour.

Now my chief Design in this Treatise, was to attempt a Recovery of some of these doubting Christians, or to stop them in their Course toward Apostasy, by representing the dreadful and eternal Hazard of rejecting the Gospel of *Christ*, if it should at last appear to have come from Heaven: That those who think of abandoning the *Christian Faith* might see and be persuaded, that none of their Pretences to *natural Religion* can give them an effectual Security from the condemning Sentence of the great Judge, if they shall to the last oppose and resist the Light of Evidence, that shines round the Gospel in our Nation and our Day.

I am well aware that my Conduct and Manner of Argument on this
2
Subject,

Subject, will be represented as very uncharitable: Perhaps I shall be told, that I assume the awful Province of God, that I enter into the Hearts of Men, and pass a Judgment concerning their Sincerity, while I scarce suppose it possible for a Man to be truly *sincere* in seeking the Truth, and yet to live and die an *Infidel*, where the Gospel is surrounded with its proper Light and Evidences.

I must confess 'tis a sensible Grief to me, when I am constrained by the Word of God to say any Thing terrible and severe against my Fellow-Creatures, my Partners in Flesh and Blood. I would hate and avoid all the Characters of a censorious and uncharitable Spirit. The Gospel of *Christ* is a Gospel of Love, and while I preach it for the Salvation of Men, I would never mix my own Wrath with it, nor would I willingly lye under the Shadow of such an Imputation.

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on. But when the great and blessed God, who has made this Gospel, and who searches the Hearts of Men, has pronounced his *Wrath* and *Damnation* so often against those who *believe not in his Son*, 'tis he himself who does in Effect declare, that *they are not sincere in their Searches after the Truth*: For I am persuaded he would never proclaim such Vengeance from Heaven against any sincere Soul, that with humble Diligence and Faithfulness inquires, *What he must do to please his Maker*.

The blessed God who has ordain'd the Gospel of his Son *Jesus*, to be the Means of the Salvation of Men to the End of the World, has certainly furnish'd it with sufficient Evidence for the Propagation of it, thro' the successive Generations of Men, among all that are humble and willing Inquirers after Truth. The God of Nature knows well how much Light is
b
necessary,

P R E F A C E.

necessary, both in the Eye and on the Object, to convey the Sight of it to those who are willing to see: The same allwise God well knows also what Capacity in the Mind is requisite, and what Degree of Evidence is necessary to attend any revealed Truth, in order to its being received by the honest and sincere Soul: And his Equity and Goodness would never have suffered such a heavy Curse to be denounced against Unbelievers, if he had not foreseen, that nothing but some corrupt and guilty Prejudices could withhold Men from receiving the Truth of the Gospel, where it is accompanied with its necessary Testimonials. 'Tis not I therefore, but 'tis the Word of God that declares the Unbelievers of his Gospel to be insincere, while he pronounces such a Curse upon them.

The holy and gracious Lips of our blessed *Jesus*, who knew the Hypocirsy

crisy and Insincerity of the Jews in his Day, did often pronounce a Sentence of Death and Destruction upon them; and when he left the World he repeated this Condemnation upon all Infidels, where his Gospel should come with its proper Evidence, *He that believeth not shall be damned.* The great Apostle of the Gentiles has assured us, that *they who believe not have suffered the God of this World, i. e. the Devil, to blind their Minds,* and he has confirmed the awful Sentence, *If any Man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, or accursed, till the Lord come,* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

Now since these solemn Denunciations of divine Vengeance are frequently repeated in our Bible, and make a Part of that Book wherein our Religion lies, since we are bound to *declare all the Counsel of God* for the Salvation of Men, and *knowing these Terrors*

of the Lord, we cannot but set them before the Faces of those who are in Danger of being drawn away from their Stedfastness in the Faith; that if they should at last perish in their own Unbelief, they may not lay the Blame upon the Ministers of the Gospel, and plead that they had no Warning of this Condemnation.

'Tis therefore no Instance of an uncharitable Conduct, to point out to careless Wanderers that Pit of Fire and Destruction into which they are hastening, unless they turn their Feet to another Path: It has been always counted an Act of Charity and Love, to pluck the Wandering Traveller from a fatal Precipice, or affright him from approaching the Brink of it, by displaying all the dreadful Mischiefs and the certain Death that will attend his Fall.

On this View of Things, if any Person shall be led by Providence to look

look into these Discourses of mine, whose Thoughts have been entangled, and his Heart drawn away to any Degrees of Apostasy, or whose Faith of *Christ* and the Gospel hath been shaken by the Cavils of Men, I would beg one Favour of him for his own Sake more than for mine, and that is, that he would not turn over these Pages as a Matter of mere Curiosity, nor let his Wit loose upon them in wanton Sport, nor toss the solemn Subject about as an airy Jest, or a Matter of trifling Dispute. This awful Theme and Controversy in Great Britain, hath in my Judgment no less Consequences attending it than everlasting Life or everlasting Death.

*Non hic levia aut ludicra petuntur
Præmia, Lectoris de vitâ animæque
salute Certatur.*

The Indulgence of a sportful Fancy, or a ludicrous Spirit in Questions

so

so divine and important, is not the Character of an honest Mind which seeks the Truth, nor is it a likely Way to find it. The great God, the Maker and Lord of all, and the Fountain of all Light and Knowledge, is not wont to bless such Triflers with divine Irradiations. His awful Majesty, and his tremendous Justice, many Times leave them to *sport themselves in their own Deceivings*, till they have woven a fatal Snare for their Souls, and his righteous Judgment may give them up to perish for ever in their own impious Mirth and Madness.

If any wavering Christian has a sincere Desire to be establish'd in the Truth, and to save his own Soul, let him set his Conscience at Work in the Sight of God, while he peruses the Books written on this Subject. Let him examine with an honest Heart, whether it be not the utmost Hazard of his immortal Interest to depart from

from the Christian Faith, and to *for-
sake the holy Commandments that have
been delivered to him* in the Gospel.
Let him see if he can find any other
solid and substantial Hope of the Fa-
vour of God, of the Pardon of his
Sins, and final Happiness, such as will
enable him upon just and rational
Grounds, to face Death with Courage,
and enter into the immediate Presence
of an holy and offended God.

May the Spirit of *Christ* accom-
pany this *Essay*, to guard his own
divine Religion, and make these Dis-
courses happily effectual to establish
the professing Christian in his holy
Faith, to secure the wavering from
Apostasy, and to prevent the eternal
Ruin of Souls. *Amen.*

London Feb.

4th. 1728.

E R R A T A.

P. 32. *l. penult.* Uzzab. p. 42. *l. 19.* punisht for their Er-
rors. p. 50. *l. 12.* to all the Will. p. 53. *l. 7.* in a Patriarchal
or Jewish. *l. 21.* Promises, these Things having not been re-
vealed or conveyed to them. p. 65. *l. 11.* some real. p. 167.
l. 27. for their *r.* such.

P R E F A C E

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CAVEAT

AGAINST

INFIDELITY.

2 TIM. II. 5.

*If a Man strive for Masteries, yet is
he not crown'd except he strive law-
fully.*

INTRODUCTION.

THE Life of a Christian is not a
State of Indolence and Ease: If
we seek for Salvation and Eternal
Glory in the Way of the Gospel, we must
shake off Sloth and Idleness: There is some
sacred Skill and Wisdom requir'd in it, with
a vigorous and Holy Exercise of the best

B

Powers

Powers of Nature: Therefore *St. Paul* in my Text compares it to those *Games* or bodily Exercises, which were practised at appointed Seasons by the *Greeks*, wherein they exerted their utmost Care and Activity: He uses the same Comparison in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, Chap. ix. 24, 25. Where he speaks of *being temperate in all things*, and of *striving to obtain a Crown*: And he alludes to it in several other Parts of his Writings. The Apostle *John*, or rather *Christ* himself seems to have some reference to it in his Epistles to the Churches, where he proposes large Recompences to them that overcome, and Promises a *Crown of Life*, Rev. ii. and iii.

These *Games* were of various Kinds, such as running a Race, Wrestling, Fighting, &c. Now for each of these Kinds of Contest there were certain Laws and Rules ordain'd, as in *Racing*, they must start from such a Spot of Ground, they must run such a Road or Track, they must reach such a Goal, and approach it in a proper Manner too: In *Wrestling*, the Law of the Contest requir'd them to be naked, that they might not take the Advantage of each other's Clothing: In *Fighting*, they must use only that sort of Weapon which was appointed for the Combat, &c. And tho' the Crown which was given to the Conquerors was but a poor *corruptible* one, as the Apostle speaks, for 'twas made

made of the Leaves of an Olive, a Laurel, a Pine-tree, or of Parsley, yet, so much Honour attended it, and so strict were the Overseers of it, that none obtain'd this Prize, tho' he took never so much Pains, and shew'd never so great Activity, if he did not manage himself in all things according to the Rules of the Game or Contest.

So a Man, who seeks the *Prize* of heavenly Happiness, and Aims at the *Crown of Life and Glory*, must carefully conform himself to the sacred Rules which God has appointed, otherwise he may labour and strive in vain. I take this to be the precise Meaning of the Apostle in the Text, and it gives us fair Occasion to derive this Doctrine.

Doct. *All our Pains to obtain the heavenly Prize will be lost, unless we seek it in the right Way and Manner*: We shall not be crown'd except we strive lawfully.

To render this Doctrine useful and practical, I shall

I. Endeavour to shew *what is the right Way by which God has appointed us to seek eternal Salvation, or what are the Rules and Laws of this sacred Exercise, in order to obtain the heavenly Crown,*

II. I shall lay down some *Considerations to inforce and prove this Doctrine*, viz. that Heaven must be sought only in this appointed Way.

III. I would *Answer several Queries and Objections, which are commonly rais'd against it in our Day, chiefly by such as disbelieve the Gospel.*

IV. I shall offer *two or three general Exhortations to Christians, deriv'd from this Discourse.*

V. Propose *some Preservatives against Apostasy, or a Departure from the true Way of Salvation.*

S E C T. I.

The Rules to obtain Salvation propos'd, and the Duties requir'd in the Gospel, or the necessary Articles of Christianity.

THE first Enquiry is this, *viz.* What is the right Way to obtain Heaven? What are the appointed Rules whereby we must govern our Belief and Practice?

The great and general Rule is the *Divine Revelation* or *Word of God*: for when Man had lost his original State of Innocency, and the Favour of God by Sin, God knew that his feeble Reason, or the Light of Nature was not sufficient to inform him what was necessary to recover his Favour, and to direct him in the Way to Happiness; and therefore he took the first Opportunity to acquaint

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acquaint his fallen Creature *Man*, that he would not for ever abandon him and all his Race, but that there was some Hope of his Recovery; and he told him of a Mediator or Saviour, even the *Seed of the Woman that should break the Serpent's Head*, i. e. he should destroy the Works of the Devil, and repair the Ruin which the Temptations of *Satan* had brought in: And doubtless at the same time the blessed God assisted the Reason and Conscience of *Adam* in his Enquiries, what Duties were to be perform'd on his Part toward his recovering an Interest in the Love of his Creator, Nor has God been wanting ever since that Time to give various Discoveries of the right Way of Salvation in several successive Ages, that Mankind might be restor'd to his Favour and Image again.

The last, the brightest, and the best of all these Discoveries is that which he has made in the Gospel by his Son *Jesus Christ*, and by the Evangelists and Apostles in the Writings of the New Testament: This Book therefore contains the Rules of that sacred Exercise or *Contest*, in which we must now be engag'd to obtain the *Crown of Glory*. No Pretences to the Light of Reason, no vain Fancies of new Revelations, no Devices of our own Heart must dare to oppose, or contradict the Rules given us in this holy Book; if we reject the Gospel there is nothing will serve us instead of it.

I will

I will not here enter into the Question, how far they shall be accepted of God, who never had the Word of God reveal'd to them, nor the Gospel of Christ publish'd among them. I reserve this for the End of my Discourse. 'Tis sufficient to say at present that God the Judge of all the Earth, will deal in Righteousness and Wisdom with all Mankind, and he is not wanting in Mercy to his Creatures, who submit themselves to him according to the Dispensation they live under. Where he has given less, less shall be requir'd: But this is certain, that he requires of all Men a Conformity to the Rules which he has made known to them; and therefore wheresoever the Gospel comes with sufficient Light and Evidence, as it has done to us in the *British Isles*, he expects that we should learn the Rules of our holy Race from thence, and conform ourselves to them, if we would ever obtain the Prize of Glory.

But to descend to Particulars. The appointed Way to obtain Heaven under the Gospel may be compriz'd under the following Heads, which I call the necessary Requisites in order to Salvation, and I have multiply'd them into six Particulars, that I might be more explicite and plain.

I. *A Knowledge and Belief of the great Articles of natural Religion, whether they contain*

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*contain Doctrines or Duties**: For tho' these alone and in themselves are not sufficient to save Sinners, yet they are necessary in order to our Salvation, and the Gospel of Christ teaches and confirms them all.

We must believe that there is a God, the one only true and living God, Almighty, All-wise and All-good, the Creator of all things; and we must believe that he governs the World which he has made, and does not sit idle in Heaven, and let his Creation run at random; but that as a wise and holy Ruler, he takes Notice of the Behaviour and Conduct of all his reasonable Creatures.

We must believe that there is a real Difference between Virtue and Vice, between Good and Evil: And that this does not depend, as some have imagin'd, upon the mere Customs and Fashions of particular Countries, or the Will of Princes, but upon the Nature of things and the Will of God. It is God, who has written it plain in our own Consciences, and in the very Frame of our rational Souls, that 'tis our Duty to fear and love him, to pray to him for what Blessings we want, and to praise him and give him Thanks for what Mercies we enjoy, and to honour, worship, and obey him

* By the Articles of *natural Religion* in this Place, I chiefly intend such as belong to Mankind in general, without Regard to his fallen and sinful State.

according

according to the Discoveries of his Nature and his Will which he has made to us. And as it is our Duty to know, and honour this God, so 'tis evident that Atheism and Blasphemy, and the Neglect or Contempt of God and things sacred, are high Crimes and Offences against him.

It is written also in our Consciences with sufficient Evidence, that 'tis our Duty to love our Neighbour, to be honest, and just, and faithful, and kind: And that Cheating and Falshood, Injustice and Cruelty to our fellow Creatures are hateful Vices and never to be practised. It would be endless and needless to cite Texts of Scripture to prove all this.

We must believe also that this great God, the righteous Governour of the World will call us to an Account hereafter, how we have behav'd ourselves here, and will sit as a Judge upon our past Conduct in this Life. The Light of Nature tells us there is some Reason to hope, that he will reward us gloriously, if we are faithful and diligent, perfect and persevering in our Obedience to all his Will; and it gives us just Ground to fear that he will punish us severely in a future State, if we are impious and perverse, and act contrary to the known Rules of our Duty. But the Light of Scripture gives us much clearer and surer Discoveries of a Heaven and a Hell, a State of Reward and Punishment, *according as our Works shall be.* 'Tis

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'Tis the Voice of Reason, and 'tis the Language of Revelation, that there is a future State to set all things right, and to account for the Scenes of Disorder in this present Life. *Without the Faith of things unseen it is impossible to please God; for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of those that diligently seek him,* Heb. xi. 6. Nor was there ever any Revelation of Grace that God made to fallen Man for his Salvation, but it pre-suppos'd or included this Article of a future State, and all the other Doctrines of natural Religion in it.

II. Another thing necessary to our attainment of the heavenly Happiness is a *due Sense of our Guilt and Misery by Reason of Sin, and a humble Confession of it before God*: Some Conviction of Sin may be deriv'd from our own Experience, if we do but converse with ourselves, and take a Survey of our own Hearts and Lives, and compare them with the Law of God written in our Consciences. Where is the Man, who has perfectly obey'd all the Dictates of his own Reason, and never contradicted this inward Rule of Duty? Surely if we know any thing of ourselves, we must confess we are Sinners; we have offended God our Creator and broken his Laws; *We have all sinned and fallen short of the Glory*
C of

of God, we have lost all just Hope of the Reward: *Every Mouth must be stopped, and all the World become guilty before God, Rom. iii.*

19. There is none innocent, no not one. Our own Conscience accuses and condemns us, and subjects us to the just Judgment of God.

And not only must we be sensible of our being expos'd to Divine Anger by reason of Sins actually committed, but we must also be acquainted with the Corruption of our Natures, the Body of Sin which dwells within us, and be abas'd before God because of those inward sinful Inclinations, and vain Affections, which are ever busy and ever starting up to defile our Consciences, and pollute our Lives.

The Gospel of Christ makes a Sense of Sin necessary to Salvation. *They who are whole have no need of the Physician; but only those who are sick: I came not, says our Lord Jesus, to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance, Mat. ix. 12, 13.* This is the Language of the Old Testament as well as the New: *He that covereth his Sins shall not prosper, but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have Mercy, Prov. xxviii. 13.* If we confess our Sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins: But if we say we have no Sin, we make God a Liar, and the Truth is not in us, 1 John i. 8, 9, 10. Now it can never be suppos'd that those Wretches are
in

Sect. I. *against* INFIDELITY. II

in the right Way to Salvation, who, either thro' stupid Ignorance, or a great Degree of Pride and Self-Flattery, fancy themselves innocent: These proud vain Creatures must be far from the Path of Salvation and Deliverance, who are not convinced of their Sin and Danger. They are not in the Way to obtain Relief, who feel not their Distress and Misery. Such a haughty Spirit of vain Conceit makes God a Liar, by contradicting the Testimony that he gives in his Word concerning all the Children of Men.

III. *Sincere Repentance is another necessary Duty* required in the Gospel, in order to a Sinner's Salvation. Now this *Repentance* implies a hearty Sorrow for all our past Offences, and a sincere Return from Sin to the Love and Obedience of God,

The very Light of Nature and Reason, which teaches an innocent Creature to obey his Maker, does as plainly tell a sinful Creature, that he must repent of his Disobedience, that he must be heartily grieved for having broken the Laws of his God, and that he must love and obey him for Time to come, if ever he expect the least Favour from him.

The Scripture enforces this sacred Duty of Repentance continually upon the Consciences of Men, and the Gospel of *Christ* being sent to the Nations, *commands all Men every*

where to repent, Acts xvii. 30. 'Tis the very Word of Christ, except ye repent ye must all perish, Luke xiii. 3, 5. Not only must we forsake Sin, and avoid it in our Actions, but we must hate it in our Hearts, and fulfil all our Duties from a Principle of divine Love wrought in us. Our Wills are by Nature averſe to God and Goodneſs, and turned toward Sin and Folly; We muſt therefore repent and be converted, that our Sins may be blotted out, Acts iii. 19.

Our whole Natures are vitiated and ſpoiled by Sin, and we muſt be regenerated or *born again*, and made *new Creatures*, i. e. a univerſal Change muſt paſs upon all the Powers of our Natures by the Influence of the Holy Spirit, or we can never be fit for the Enjoyment of God. 'Tis only the *pure in Heart that ſhall ſee God*. Except a Man be *born again, be born of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot ſee the Kingdom of God, nor enter into it*, John iii. 3, 5. i. e. Except his Nature, which was ſinful, be renewed unto Holineſs, ſo that he begin to live a new Life, as a new born Child, he cannot be admitted into the Kingdom of divine Grace: Except he be cleansed from the Power of Sin by the Influence of the Spirit of God, as the Body is cleansed from outward Defilements by Water, (which is typified and represented in Baptiſm) he cannot be ſaved; for *nothing that defileth ſhall enter into the*
King-

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Kingdom of Heaven: and he that hath not the Spirit of Christ to sanctify him, to enable him to mortify Sin, and create him anew unto good Works, such a one is none of his, Rom. viii. 9. that is, he does not belong to Christ, nor hath any Interest in him as a Saviour.

IV. Another necessary Rule we must observe, is this, (*viz.*) *To draw near to God, and to seek his Favour by a Mediator.* This seems to be designed in the Words of St. Paul, which I have chosen for the Foundation of this Discourse. He that will be *crowned must strive lawfully*, and in the following Verses he bids *Timothy consider what he teaches him, and remember that Jesus Christ of the Seed of David was raised from the Dead according to his Gospel, i. e. Remember that Jesus Christ approved himself to be the Messiah, the anointed Saviour by his rising from the dead. This is the only lawful Way of striving for the heavenly Crown, i. e. by Jesus the Mediator.*

This Doctrine of the Mercy of God to guilty Creatures by a Mediator, was the plain Design of the first Promise made to Adam after his Fall, *The Seed of the Woman shall bruise the Serpent's Head*, as 'tis written, Gen. iii. 15. Those very Words led him to a Mediator, *i. e. to one born of a Woman, that should relieve Mankind under the Mischief*
Satan

Satan had brought upon them. This blessed Mediator and our Saviour has been always kept in View, thro' all the succeeding Revelations which God has made to the Children of Men. The *Messiah*, the anointed of God, who was to be *the Light of the Gentiles, and the Glory of Israel, and the Saviour of Men, even to the Ends of the Earth*, was continually expected by the ancient Saints.

And in these latter Days we are now bound not only to trust in God, manifesting his Mercy thro' some Mediator, but to believe that *Jesus of Nazareth* is he, that the great appointed Mediator between God and Man is the Man Christ Jesus, 1 Tim. ii. 5. for Christ himself has said it, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your Sins*, John viii. 24. 'Tis sufficiently manifested in the Gospel, that there is no other Hope or Refuge: *There is Salvation in no other, nor is there any other Name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved, beside the Name of Jesus*, Acts iv. 12. Our Lord assures us, that he is the Way, that no Man comes to the Father but by him, John xiv. 6. And when he bid his Disciples preach the Gospel to every Creature, he bid them not only tell the World, that *he that believeth shall be saved*, but that *he who believeth not shall be damned*, Mark xvi. 16.

Here

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Here let it be noted also, that we are not called to trust in *Christ* only as a Mediator, to intercede or plead for us, (tho' this is Part of his appointed Work, *Heb. vii. 25.*) but we must receive him also as one who has made Propitiation or Atonement for Sin. This is called in *Rom. v. 11. receiving the Atonement.* For he becomes our *Propitiation thro' Faith in his Blood, Rom. iii. 25.* And if we sin wilfully by a publick and obstinate Rejection of him, under his Character of a Sacrifice of Atonement, I fear we shall find that *there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful Expectation of God's fiery Indignation to devour us, Heb. x. 26, 27.* This Text seems to me to carry a solemn Terror in it, against those who pretend to be Christians, and yet dare to deny that *Christ* made a proper Atonement for Sin by his Death, since this Doctrine of Atonement for our Sins by the Blood of *Christ*, is so often and so expressly asserted in the Word of God *.

You see then, that Trust in a Mediator, and in the Mercy of God manifested thro' him, is a necessary Part of our Religion. This is that Faith in *Christ* which is foretold so plainly in the Old Testament, that *in him should the Gentiles trust.* This is re-

* I do not tarry here to enlarge on the Proof of the Atonement of *Christ* for Sin, having sufficiently proved it in the 4th and 5th Sermons of my Third Volume.

presented so often in the New Testament, as the great Requisite of Salvation, (*viz.*) the Belief of *Jesus Christ* the Son of God, to be the only Mediator between God and Man, and a trusting in the Mercy of God in and thro' this Mediator, a committing the Soul into his Hands, as a Lord and Saviour from Sin and from Hell: And it is called *Faith in his Blood*, to shew that we must trust in him particularly, as a Mediator of Atonement. This is that *Faith of Christ* that St. Paul preached wheresoever he preached the Duty of *Repentance*, as a necessary Attendant of it, in order to a Sinner's Acceptance with God. Acts xx. 20, 21. *Publickly, and from House to House he taught the Ephesians, and he testified both to the Jews and Greeks, Repentance toward God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

V. *A constant sincere Pursuit of universal Holiness, and Perseverance therein till the Hour of our Death.* This is also necessary in order to our Arrival at Heaven. We are entered into a Race when we are first converted, and set our Faces toward Heaven; we must not turn backward, lest we lose the Prize. We must keep the Path of Duty with Sincerity and Diligence, and in this Manner we must run thro' the whole Stage of Life, till we reach the Goal of Death, if we would obtain the glorious Crown of Righteousness. 'Tis

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'Tis true, the Gospel does not suppose or expect, that we should be innocent or perfect in Obedience; and therefore a gracious God has made Provision for the Repentance of Christians, and their Return to his Mercy after their renewed Falls and Sins, otherwise no Flesh could be saved: But 'tis our Duty to stir up our selves to arise and return to God with sincere Sorrow, and then with greater Watchfulness to set upon our Duty, and make it appear through the Course of Life, that in our Heart we hate Sin and love Holiness.

'Tis not the costly or toilsome Performance of Ceremonies, nor any long slavish Labours in outward Forms of Godliness, nor any painful Mortifications of the natural Body, and severe Penances of Fasting and Scourging, that will be accepted of God instead of inward Piety; nor yet is that Piety to be all inward and confined merely to the Heart; but it must appear in the Life too. *The Grace of God that brings Salvation, teaches us to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World, Titus ii. 12. and by our good Works to adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things.* Whatsoever particular Neglects the great God may excuse, he will never dispense with a general Neglect of Holiness: For it is said expressly, Heb. xii. 14. *Without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord.*

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He is a holy God, and as compassionate and condescending as he is, he doth not lay aside one Ray of his own Holiness, in order to display his Grace, nor will he dishonour that glorious Perfection of his Divinity to save a World of Sinners. The Gospel and the Grace of God that saves us, can save us only in a Way becoming the Holiness of his Nature. No unholy Thing shall enter into Heaven.

We who are engaged in this Christian Exercise, have much of Strife and Conflict to pass thro': 'Tis not only a *Race*, but a *Combat* also, and it implies *wrestling* and *fighting*: We must take up Arms against the Sins of our Natures, and the Corruptions of our Hearts, as well as against *Satan*, and the Temptations of this World. Then surely those who know not their spiritual Dangers, who are not made sensible of the Sins that dwell within them, have no Reason to imagine or expect they shall be Conquerors: They are not yet engaged in the spiritual Warfare, nor apprized of their spiritual Enemies: They are not in the Way to obtain the Prize. *If we live according to the Inclinations of our Flesh we shall die, Rom. viii. 13. But if we thro' the Spirit mortify the Deeds of the Body, we shall live. They that are Christ's must crucify the Flesh, with its Affections and Lusts, Gal. v. 24. And 'tis not only Flesh and Blood must be*
opposed,

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opposed, but *Principalities and Powers of Darkness*, and all the Hosts of Hell, as well as an Army of Temptations from this wicked World, *Eph. vi. 12.* and if we lay down our Weapons and give over fighting, we give up all Pretences to Victory, and lose the Crown.

VI. *A humble Hope in the divine Promises of Joy and Happiness in the World to come, is the last Thing I shall mention.* This is so necessary a Grace, that it is said, *We are saved by Hope, Rom. viii. 24.* And it is often put for *Faith* itself, in the Language of ancient Prophecy, and in the Writings of the Apostles. *Christ* himself is called *our Hope*, *1 Tim. i. 1.* Unbelief of the Promises, and Despair of Heaven cut off all the Sinews of Action, and will effectually prevent us from seeking and striving to obtain the Prize: We must live therefore in humble Expectation of future Glory, *looking for the blessed Hope and the glorious Appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

And the Apostle's Argument in *1 Cor. xv. 12, &c.* seems to make the Belief and Hope even of the Resurrection of the Body, a necessary Part of our Christianity also: For *if there be no Resurrection of the Dead, then is not Christ risen; and if Christ be not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your Faith is also vain, ye are yet in your Sins.* For my

Part I must own, that where this Gospel comes in such full Light and Evidence, as we enjoy it, I hardly know what to make of their Christianity, who deny the Doctrine of the *Resurrection*.

These are the *substantial* Parts of our Religion, and the *chief Rules of the Christian Race, or Contest in which we are engaged in order to obtain the Crown*. And concerning these, I have endeavoured to make it appear from Reason, or express Testimony of Scripture, that God, the great and blessed God, will not dispense with any of them in those Persons who expect Favour and Salvation at his Hands.

There are indeed many *Circumstantials* that belong to our Religion, which are by no Means of equal Importance with those *substantial* Parts of Christianity before mentioned. In many of these Circumstances of our Duty, it has not pleased the Spirit of God, to write the Rules of them in so plain and express Language; and therefore there may be very different Sentiments and Practices in these Points, without endangering our Salvation, without breaking the Bonds of our Christian Love and Unity. It is of infinitely more Importance, that we believe there is but one God, that he must be worshipped and served by his Creatures, that there is an essential Difference between Virtue and Vice, that there is a future State
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of Rewards and Punishments, that we are guilty Creatures, and can obtain Favour of God no other Way but by a Mediator, that we must repent of our Sins, and have our Hearts changed and renewed unto Holiness, and live in the sincere Practice of every known Duty, and in humble Expectation of future Blessedness; I say, these Things are of infinitely greater Moment, than whether we must be baptized in Infancy or riper Years; whether that Ceremony must be performed by dipping or sprinkling; whether the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper must be received in the Posture of Guests sitting at the Table, in the Posture of Children standing round their Father's Board, to receive his Distributions of Bread and Wine, or in the Posture of humble Suppliants kneeling and adoring; whether our Ministers must be ordain'd, and our Churches governed by Bishops or Presbyters, or how far the concurrent Acts of the whole Church have an Influence into these Solemnities; whether our Prayers must be immediately conceived in our Hearts, and invented as they are uttered in new Expressions continually, or whether we may use Forms written down before-hand: These Things, and many others of the like Nature, because they are not of such Necessity, therefore are not so evidently determined in the Word of God.

But

But as for the six general Rules before mentioned, I don't see how we can expect that God should dispense with any of them, since he has appointed his written Word to be the Rule of his final Judgment, and he seems to have required them in his Word in so peremptory a Manner. He that strives and takes Pains to obtain Heaven, with a Neglect of these Rules, I think we may boldly say, *he does not strive lawfully*, and he has no sufficient Ground to hope that *he shall be crowned*.

S E C T. II.

Considerations to prove the Doctrine.

I Proceed now to the second Thing which I proposed, and that is to lay down several *Considerations which may serve to evince and prove the Truth of the Doctrine*, and make it still more evident, that such as neglect the Rules of God's Appointment shall not obtain Salvation.

Consideration I. *God alone has a Right to appoint the Way to his own Favour, and he is jealous to secure this Prerogative.* God has the first and most unquestionable Property in us as his Creatures, and sovereign Dominion over us as Subjects. He has a Right, and he only, to ordain in what Manner we should honour him, and seek his Favour.

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If we were *Innocent* Creatures, 'tis he must direct us to any special Instances of our Duty in that State of *Innocence*, and tell us how we may keep ourselves in his Love: Or since we are *guilty* and *rebellious*, he only can appoint the sacred Methods to obtain his own Favour again, and gain an Interest in his Compassion.

The Lord our God is a jealous God, and will not suffer himself to be disobey'd or mock'd in things that so nearly concern his own Sovereignty. This is evident in the second Commandment, where he appoints the Method of his own Worship: And tho' we may think Paintings, or Images to represent his Glory, and his Power, are very agreeable and proper to assist our sensible Natures, yet he forbids every thing of this kind as Mediums of Divine Worship, and he solemnizes the Prohibition with an awful Discovery of his own Jealousy: He declares that he will avenge himself of those that dare to worship him in unappointed or forbidden Ways, even to the third and fourth Generations. 'Tis worthy of our Notice, that when he charges the *Jews* of old with some of their idolatrous Abominations, he mentions this as the Reason of his Anger, that they practised things *which he commanded not, neither came they into his Heart*, Jerem. vii. 31.

When

When God design'd his own Worship to be attended with a variety of Pomp and Ceremony, he prescrib'd every Part of it to *Moses* with great Exactness: And when he had given an Account how the Tabernacle, and Table, and the Candlesticks, and the Altars should be made, he gives him a Charge that he should precisely follow the Divine Directions, *Exod. xxv. 9, 40.* *Look that thou make them after their Pattern, which was shew'd thee in the Mount.* Now if the great God requires such Accuracy, and such exact Conformity to his Rules in matters merely external, typical, and ceremonial, how much more may we suppose that he will be strict and severe in demanding a Conformity to his own appointed Methods of Salvation in things of more solemn, more spiritual, and everlasting Concernment.

Suppose a Traitor guilty of Death, should have Orders from the King his Sovereign to enter into his Presence, dress'd in the borrow'd Ornaments of the Prince his Son, and to be introduc'd by his Hand in order to obtain Pardon; now if this condemn'd Criminal should resolve rather to come and appear before the King in some bright Ornament of his own preparing, and without the Mediation of the Prince; would he not deserve to be frown'd away from the Throne, and sent directly to Execution? Would not
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this be a new Indignity offer'd to the King himself, and a fresh Instance of Rebellion and Disobedience? So when we consider our selves as Rebels and Traitors against the Majesty of Heaven, if we will refuse the Methods of God's own Appointment in order to obtain his Favour, and will walk in the Devices of our own Hearts, this will be justly construed a Continuance in our Rebellion, and we must expect the Sentence of Death to be executed upon us, *Isa. 1. 11. Behold all ye that kindle a Fire, that compass yourselves about with Sparks, walk in the Light of your Fire, and in the Sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of mine Hand, ye shall lye down in Sorrow.*

Consideration II. *All the Ways of recovering the Favour of God, that proud vain Man would contrive for himself are evidently fruitless and ineffectual, and if we consider them distinctly, each of them will appear to be insufficient.*

Shall we come to God in the Way of Innocency, and pretend that we have done no harm? But we have before prov'd that all Men are guilty. *There is none Righteous, no not one.*

Shall we come in the Way of Hope and Reliance upon the general and absolute Mercy of God, trusting that God will forgive our Sins because he is infinitely good and kind? But
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the Light of Nature can give us no manner of Assurance, that he will express his Kindness and Goodness in forgiving sinful Men. This is a free Act of his Will, and there is nothing in his Nature, or in our Circumstances that obliges him to it. Nor in his Gospel hath he given any Promise of such Mercy to be exercised, but thro' Jesus his Son: *The Grace of God that appears to Men is only thro' Jesus Christ, Tit. iii. 4. He justifies us freely by his Grace, but it is thro' the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ, Rom. iii. 24.*

Shall we approach to God in the Way of humble Address to him, and beg him to accept of our *Repentances and Mortifications*? But these can never atone for our past Offences. What are the Tears, or Sorrows, or little Penances of a Creature to make Satisfaction for the Affronts offer'd to God?

Shall we come to God and hope for Acceptance by our *best Duties of Righteousness*? But they are all imperfect, and the Law of God in its perfect Purity would condemn both us and them: Besides, if they were never so Perfect they could not make Recompence for Transgressions past.

Shall we seek to *Saints in Heaven, or Angels, or any higher rank of Creatures to become Mediators, Advocates, and Intercessors for us*? Alas! We have no Acquaintance with them, nor do we know that any of our Petitions can come to their Knowledge: Besides, This

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Office is so sublime and glorious, that it seems too assuming for them to undertake, unless the offended Majesty of Heaven had appointed them to it: They are all utterly precluded by their want of sufficient Merit, as well as by the Designation of his Son *Jesus Christ* alone to that glorious Office.

In vain shall sinful guilty Man hope to come near to a holy and offended God, but by the Death and Righteousness of his own Son. Ever since the first *Adam* laid the Foundation of our Ruin, and divided us from God our Maker by his Sin, Mankind has been still wandering farther from God, and rebelling against him; and 'tis the second *Adam* alone that can restore us to his Favour again by his Righteousness, *Rom. v. 19.* *As by one Man's Disobedience many were made Sinners, so by the Obedience of one Man shall many be made righteous.*

But to proceed in shewing the Insufficiency of sinful Man to return to God by his own Power or Merit. All that we have insisted on here is but one Part of our Misery: We must look upon ourselves not only guilty of many past Offences in the Sight of God, but as having our Natures ruin'd, and the Powers of them infeeble and broken by Sin. We are dark, ignorant, and averse to God and all that is holy. We cannot learn Divine Things savingly without the Teachings of the *holy Spirit*: We

can't change our own sinful Natures to holiness without his special Influences: We can't mortify all the rising Corruptions, and reigning Iniquities of our Hearts, and transform our own Souls into the Likeness of God: By Nature we are Enemies to God and Goodness; our own Reasonings, our moral Motives, our Rules of Philosophy, and all our self-invented Methods of austere Penance and Mortification, will not wean our Hearts from the Love of Sin and Vanity, and work that supreme Love to God in our Souls, and that Delight in him above all things, which is necessary in order to true Happiness. 'Tis a *new Creation*, 'tis a *Resurrection from the Dead*, 'tis a *being born again*, and what mere Creature is sufficient for these Almighty Works?

As 'tis nothing but the Gospel that shews us the Atonement of *Christ*, which is equal to the Guilt of our Offences; and how by that Atonement we are to be reconcil'd to God, so 'tis nothing but the Gospel that reveals to us the condescending Grace of God, and the powerful Influences of his own Spirit, whereby we may have our Natures renew'd and fitted for the Presence and Enjoyment of God*.

Consideration III. *Since the Gospel of Christ is establish'd as the Way of our Access unto God,*

* See these things prov'd more at large in the two first Discourses of my first Volume of Sermons.

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there is an awful and terrible Curse pronounc'd against those, who bring in any other pretended Gospel or Way of Salvation, Gal. i. 9. If any Man preach any other Gospel to you than that ye have receiv'd, let him be accurs'd: and this Curse is not only pronounc'd against Men, but against Angels themselves, if we could suppose any of them should attempt such an Affront to the Government of God. Ver. 8. Tho' We or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel to you, than that which we have preach'd, let him be accurs'd. Behold here St. Paul, a little and despicable Figure of a Man, but under the Influence of the Divine Spirit, pronouncing a Curse upon himself an Apostle, and upon the highest Angel in Heaven if he should preach another Gospel. The Sovereignty of God in the Appointment of the Means of our Salvation will maintain its own unrival'd Character and Dignity in a sublime Degree, and he declares his holy Jealousy of the least Intrenchment upon it. Wo be to the Man that attempts to lay any other Foundation for a Sinner's Hope; he exposes himself to such a *Curse* as would sink an Apostle, or an Angel down to Hell and eternal Misery.

Consideration IV. *The great God has already made several Persons become terrible Instances of his Indignation, when they have pretended to attempt to please, or serve him in*
other

other Methods than he himself has appointed. Read the Story of Nadab and Abihu, the Sons of Aaron, in Levit. x. when they took their Censers and burnt Incense in them and offered strange Fire before the Lord which he commanded them not; there went out Fire from the Lord and devour'd them, and they died before the Lord. 'Tis suppos'd by learned Men that when the Divine Fire came from Heaven and consumed the Burnt-Offering, Levit. ix. 24. this Fire was not only to be preserv'd always upon the Altar according to God's express Order, Levit. vi. 12, 13. The Fire shall ever be burning and never go out: But that no other Fire was lawful to be us'd in burning the Sacrifices or the Incense: And when Nadab and Abihu neglected to use this sacred Fire, and put common Fire in their Censers in the Room of it, this was the very Crime which God so terribly avenged. This is that (said Moses) which the Lord spake, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the People will I be glorified.

Behold a second Instance of the dreadful Anger and high Resentment of God upon a like Occasion, when Korah, Dathan and Abiram with 250 Princes of the Assembly rose up against Moses. They presum'd to enter into the Office of Priesthood, and to offer Incense in their Censers, to which Ministry God appointed none but Aaron and his

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his Sons. Read the awful Narrative, *Numb. xvi.* When *Moses* gave them a solemn Re-proof, and pronounc'd the Doom of *Korah* and his Company, *the Ground clave asunder that was under them, and the Earth opened her Mouth and swallow'd them up and their Houses with all their Goods: They and all that appertain'd unto them went down alive into the Pit; and the Earth closed upon them and they perish'd from among the Congregation: And all Israel that were round about them, fled at the Cry of them, for they said, lest the Earth swallow us up also: And there came out Fire from the Lord, and consum'd the 250 Men that offer'd Incense.* This unexampled and astonishing Vengeance makes it appear with dreadful Evidence, that their Crime was very heinous in the Eyes of a jealous God.

Take a third Example of the Jealousy of God. *Saul* was the first King whom he appointed over *Israel*, yet when he presum'd to offer a *Burnt-Offering* himself before the appointed Hour, and did not tarry for *Samuel* to do it, God lays this to his Charge as one Reason of his taking away the Kingdom from him, *viz. because he did not keep the Commandment or Appointment of the Lord, 1 Sam. xiii. 12.—14.* And yet he seems to have had a very good Excuse too, and did it almost unwillingly: *I forc'd my self, &c.*

In the 4th Place mark what a Monument of Indignation and Misery appears in
Uzziah,

Uzziah the King of Judah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, &c. he went into the Temple of the Lord to burn Incense upon the Altar of Incense. The King refuseth to desist from his impious Attempt, when the Priests inform'd him of his Transgression: It belongs not to thee, Uzziah, to burn Incense unto the Lord, but to the Priests the Sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn Incense, and immediately he was smitten with a foul Disease, the Leprosy rose up in his Forehead, and he was thrust out from the Temple, yea himself hastened to go out, because the Lord had smitten him, and Uzziah the King was a Leper unto the Day of his Death, and was cut off from the House of the Lord. Thus we see that God will spare neither Priests, nor Princes, nor indulge Kings to make an Inroad upon his appointed Forms of Worship, or to alter any Part of the Ceremonies which he has ordain'd. The Lord of Hosts is a great King and a jealous God.

There is yet a fifth Instance that in some respect seems to carry a more tremendous Evidence of the Jealousy of the great God in this Matter, and that is written, 2 Sam. vi. 7. When the Ark of the Lord was brought up from the House of Abinadab in a Cart, Uzzah put forth his Hand to the Ark of God, and took hold of it for the Oxen shook it. Doubtless Uzziah did this out of a pious Zeal to preserve the Ark of God, and the things

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things that were in it from being shatter'd: But the Law of God by *Moses* had ordain'd the Priests only to bear the Ark: And *the Anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his Error, and he died by the Ark of God.* Here does not seem to be any Ambition or Insolence in the Heart, presuming to attempt forbidden Work: But even where Piety and Zeal itself were exprest in a forbidden Manner, the great God is so jealous of the Honour of his Appointments, that he struck the Man dead for his mistaken Zeal: *The Lord our God (says David) made a breach upon us for that we sought him not after the due Order,* i. e. by imploying alone the Levites and Priests in removing the Ark, 1 Chron. xv. 13. And this is left upon Record as a Warning-piece to affright us for ever from pretending to honour God, and to express our Devotion for him in any other Methods than those, which he himself has ordain'd, and consecrated.

Consideration V. *The huge Contempt that God himself has thrown upon the Ways and Rules of his own Appointment when their Date is expired, gives us a plain Intimation that he will accept of no Methods of Worship, but such as he appoints.* How magnificent and illustrious beyond all our present Thoughts and Expressions, was the Worship of God

in the Tabernacle, and especially in the Temple, when those Buildings were first set up, the one by *Moses* the Prophet, and the other by *Solomon* the King? All the Pomp and Glory of the *Heathen* Temples and their golden Idols, all the Splendor of the Vestments of the Priests, and Furniture of Cathedrals and Altars in the Church of *Rome*, tho' the Riches of the World seem to be amassed and laid out there, yet it falls incomparably short of the Glory and Grandeur of the *Jewish* Worship in the Days of *Moses* and *Solomon*: But when the Term of these Ceremonies was once expir'd, and their great Design accomplish'd in the Death, the Resurrection and Intercession of *Christ*, what Names of Contempt does the Spirit of God cast upon them? They are *Elements of the World*, Gal. iv. 3. *Yokes of Bondage*, v. 1. *Weak and beggarly Elements*, iv. 9. *The Rudiments of this World*, Col. ii. 20. *Mere Shadows of good things to come*, Heb. x. 1. *Carnal Ordinances and a worldly Sanctuary*, Heb. ix. 1, 10. And even when the Apostle is speaking of the Glory of that Dispensation, he calls it *the Ministration of Death*, 2 Cor. iii. especially when the Gospel came in which is *the Ministration of Life*. And when he speaks of *Circumcision*, which was the Pride and Boast of the *Jewish* Nation, and was once the distinguishing Mark of God's special Favourites, he not only pronounces it

unprofitable,

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unprofitable, but threatens the *Galatians* that *Christ shall profit them nothing*, if they run back to Circumcision, and the Rites of *Judaism*, Gal. v. 2.

Now if the great and holy God lays such a Load of Contempt on Modes of Worship, which his own Divine Wisdom once contriv'd, and his own Authority establish'd, if he himself throws upon them such reproachful and forbidding Language, when the appointed Term of them is expir'd, can we imagine this holy God will endure Forms of Worship of the fanciful Invention of Men, or that he will indulge foolish and sinful Creatures, where his own Appointments are reveal'd, to seek his Favor by Addressing him in Methods which he has not appointed? This must be a vain Attempt, a fruitless Labour, and a foolish Hope.

Consideration VI. *There are several express Scriptures that declare Christ and his Gospel to be the only Way of our Acceptance with God, and therefore 'tis in vain for us to hope to attain the Crown of Glory if we strive not for it lawfully, or in these Methods of his divine Appointment.* Several of these Scriptures I have already cited under the first general Head, where I enumerated the most fundamental Doctrines and Duties of the Gospel, and proved that without the Practice of them there was no Hope, *John xiv. 6.*

No Man cometh to the Father but by me, 1 Cor. iii. 11. Other Foundation can no Man lay than what God has laid, i. e. Christ Jesus, Rom. ix. 31. Tho' the unbelieving Jews had a Zeal for God, and Paul himself bore this Witness for them, yet they did not attain justifying Righteousness, but fell short of it because they did not seek it by Faith in the Son of God, but by Obedience to the Works of the Law of Moses. And when our blessed Redeemer shall come in flaming Fire, 1 Theff. i. 10. he shall not only pour out his Vengeance on them that know not God, but on those also who obey not the Gospel. It was the Commission which our risen Lord gave to the Apostles, when they were sent to preach the Gospel, to let the Nations know, that he that believeth not shall be damned, Mark xvi. 16. And at the close of the Bible the Unbelievers are join'd with the Murderers, and Whoremongers, and Sorcerers, and Idolaters, and Liars, and are cast into the Lake, which burns with Fire and Brimstone by an expresse Order from the God of Heaven sitting upon his Throne of Judgment, Rev. xxi.

The last of these Considerations is sufficient of itself to evince this Truth, that a sinful Creature can never attain the Favour of God and Happiness, unless he pursue them in those Ways, and according to those Rules, which God has establish'd in his Gospel: But when we add all these six Considerations together,

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gether, methinks they should make a deep and powerful Impression upon our Consciences, and awaken us all to enquire whether we are engaged in the Pursuit of Heaven, according to the Methods of divine Appointment, and whether we are *striving lawfully for the Crown* of Glory. It will be a dreadful Disappointment to labour hard by unlawful and unappointed Methods, and at last to lose our Hope and our Crown, and our Souls for ever.

S E C T. III.

Various Objections and Queries of the Deists answered.

IT has been declared in the foregoing *Sections*, what are the *Methods* and *Rules* of divine Appointment, wherein we are to seek for eternal Life and Happiness: And several *Considerations* have been offered to enforce this Truth, that it is in vain for us to hope for the Favour of God or Life eternal, if we refuse to seek it by these appointed Ways and Rules. I come now to *answer some Queries* which the *Deists* and *Infidels* of our Age have raised by Way of *Objection* against this Doctrine: And I hope thro' divine Grace I shall be enabled to give so sufficient an Answer to them as may confirm the wavering Christian against the Danger of Apostacy, and I would wish also that
it

it might convince some of the Unbelievers in *Great Britain* of their weak and hopeless Pretences to future Happiness.

QUESTION. I.

IS it not impossible that a Man should honestly practise a Religion which he does not know, or which he does not believe? If therefore a Man be not convinced of the Truth of the Christian Religion, it may be justly said, that *he does not know it*, i. e. he doth not know Reasons enough to believe it: And will not this Ignorance be a sufficient Excuse for him in the Sight of God the Judge of all?

Answer I. 'Tis granted that Ignorance is no Crime at all, where it hath been always utterly invincible in the very Nature of Things, and where there have never been any Means of Knowledge: Therefore an *Heathen* among the savage Nations of *Africa*, where the Gospel was never preach'd, or the Name of *Jesus* never known, shall not be condemned for not believing in *Jesus*.

It is granted also, that where the Means of Knowledge are exceeding weak and defective, and the Glimmerings of divine Light very feeble, as amongst the *Laplanders* and the Northern *Russians*, doubtless Ignorance doth very much extenuate the Guilt of their Superstitions, and their ridiculous Methods of divine Worship, But

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But in the Land of *Great Britain*, and especially in the Towns and Cities of it, where these Men of Infidelity generally dwell; in *Great Britain*, where the Light of the Gospel shines with glorious Evidence, where Christianity has been brought often to the Test, and has maintained its Ground in the midst of all the intellectual Conflicts of a reasoning Age; in *Great Britain*, where the Proofs of our holy Religion have been set forth in so convincing a Light, surely the Pretences of Ignorance must be cut off here, especially among all Persons who have had a tolerable Education: And there is just Reason to fear, that this Ignorance has too much of Pride or Negligence, or Obstinacy in it, and will be imputed by the great Judge, to the evil Turns and Biasses of the Will and Affections, more than to the Weakness of the Understanding: Nor indeed will our modern Infidels bear to have it placed on this Foot, from the high Esteem they generally have of their own Reason.

The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* in the Days of our Saviour, might make the same Pretences, that they did not know the Gospel of *Christ*, i. e. they did not see or know Reasons enough to believe that *Christ* was the great Prophet, or the Saviour of the World: But our blessed Lord, who well knew the Sufficiency of the Evidence which he had given to convince Men of the Truth
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of his divine Mission, pronounces Destruction upon those Infidels. *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your Sins.* And I think it may be said, that if ever there was an Age or Nation under Heaven, since the apostolick Age, which had abundant rational Evidence of the Truth of Christianity, the Inhabitants of the chief Towns and Cities of *Great Britain* enjoy that Evidence; and especially the Men of Leisure and Learning amongst them. So that this pretended Ignorance, I fear, will at last appear to be too near a-kin to the Pretences of the Unbelievers in the Days of *Christ*, and 'tis well if they don't fall under the same Condemnation.

Ans. II. The great God, who is perfectly wise and perfectly just, well knows what Allowances to make for every Degree of Ignorance which People may lie under, according to their various Advantages or Disadvantages for Knowledge: Yet he has taken Care in his Word both of the Old and New Testament to let it appear, that Ignorance in general is not always a sufficient Excuse for Crimes committed, or for the Neglect of Duties commanded. The whole fifth Chapter of *Leviticus* is spent in directing the ignorant Sinner among the *Jews*, what he should do to make Atonement for his Transgressions, v. 17. It is said, *If a Soul sin, and commit any of these Things which*
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are forbidden to be done by the Commandments of the Lord, that he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his Iniquity.* The various Forms of Sacrifice that are there appointed, sufficiently discover that the Lord will not hold him intirely guiltless, that commits a Sin of Ignorance: And this is done that Men might not hope to excuse themselves before the great God for their Sins, merely by the Pretences of Ignorance and Mistake. In the New Testament our Saviour hath expressely told us, *Luke xii. 47, 48.* And that *Servant who knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes: But he that knew not, and did commit Things worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes.*

Here let it be always observed, that wheresoever ignorant Sinners are punish'd, the Ignorance is always culpable, and therefore 'tis in some Degree voluntary and chosen. It must arise either from Slothfulness or Neglect of Enquiry, or from some criminal Prejudices against the Truth. No Man can be punish'd for Ignorance of his Duty, if in the Nature of Things it be utterly invincible.

* I confess it may be disputed here in this Law of Moses, whether the Ignorance spoken of be an Ignorance of the Law, or an Ignorance of the Fact, yet in the Words of Christ which are cited afterwards, 'tis plainly an Ignorance of the Law that is described: And in general this Levitical Appointment sufficiently shews, that Pretences of Ignorance are not always a sufficient Excuse.

QUESTION II.

BUt can any Man believe what he will? or believe whatsoever he is bid to believe? Can I assent to any Thing which doth not appear with sufficient Evidence to my Understanding to be true? The Mind of Man in this Respect seems to be a passive Power, and cannot receive any Proposition but according to the Evidence or Proof that attends it, and according to the Strength of Light in which the Mind discerns this Evidence or Proof. Now if the Proofs of the Gospel, and the Arguments for Christianity, do not appear to my Understanding in a convincing Light, I am not able to believe it: Why then must I be condemned for not believing what, according to the Make of my Nature, I cannot believe? The Severity of this one Expression of Christ, *He that believeth not shall be damned*, is even an Obstacle to my Belief of his divine Authority; for surely the great God would never send a Messenger to pronounce Damnation against Men, for not assenting to what does not appear evident to them, *i. e.* for not believing what they cannot believe: This would be like condemning Men for not seeing what they can't see for want of sufficient Light.

Ans.

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Ans. I. This Threatning is only denounced against those to whom the Gospel is offered with sufficient Credentials. It cannot be denounced against any Person who has not enjoyed sufficient Means of Knowledge and Conviction. No Man shall be condemned for not seeing any Object, when there is not Light enough to discover the Object to him.

But let it be remembred, that the great God who is the Judge of all, well knows the Faculties of Men, and what Degree of outward Revelation is sufficient in its own Nature to discover the Truth of the Gospel to every single Person, who comes within the hearing of it, if he be sincere and honest to attend to that Light and Evidence. And this Threatning shall never be executed on Men of an honest and sincere Mind, who were willing to receive all Conviction, and attended with humble and diligent Souls, yielding up their Understanding and Assent, wheresoever there was sufficient Evidence. Such Condemnation belongs therefore only to those Persons to whom God himself knows he hath given sufficient outward Revelation, or Evidence of the Truth of the Gospel, but that thro' Negligence of Attention, or some culpable Prejudice, they refuse to receive the Truth and believe the Gospel.

Our blessed Saviour well knew the Pride and Obstinacy of the *Sadducees* and *Pharisees* in his Life-time, when after all his divine Miracles they would not believe his divine Commission: It was in vain for them to pretend, they could not see sufficient Evidence of the Gospel, for our Lord knew he had given them Evidence sufficient to convince Souls who were sincere in their Inquiry; and therefore he pronounced and repeated the Damnation upon the proud and obstinate Unbelievers, *John* viii. 21, 24. *If ye believe not that I am the Messiah, ye shall die in your Sins.*

Answ. II. To refute this Objection more effectually, let it be consider'd, that the Judgment, i. e. the Power of Assent or Dissent to a Proposition, is not a Faculty so merely passive, as some Men imagine it; for 'tis plain, that by our own Choice or Inclination, we are capable of delaying our Assent long, and abstaining from rash Judgments; and we can by our own Choice or Inclination give a precipitate or hasty Judgment, concerning an Object without sufficient Evidence; we can withhold or suspend our Judgment or Assent, where the Evidence is weak till it grow stronger; and we can also withhold our Judgment or Assent by an Unwillingness to receive into our Mind the full Light and Strength of clear Evidence, where the Proposition to be believed is displeasing to our Inclinations. Thus

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Thus it is manifest, there is much of the *Will* mingles itself with the Exercises of the *Understanding* in our Acts of Judgment. We are justly pronounced Criminals, and God may condemn us for a rash and hasty Assent to a mischievous Error, because we did not withhold our Assent till we saw fuller Evidence and Proof: And we are as justly pronounced Criminals, and are condemned justly, for withholding our Judgment, and refusing our Assent to an important Truth, where God sees and knows the Light and Evidence to be sufficiently strong for our Conviction.

There are some *Errors* that we are ready to receive into our Assent, upon very slight Argument and insufficient Evidence, because there is a secret Inclination in us that they should be true, according to the old *Latin* saying, *Quod volumus facile credimus*, What we wish to be true, we easily believe: And there are some *Truths*, which we are very backward to receive into our Assent, tho' the Evidence be never so strong, because we are unwilling they should be true: Perhaps these Truths don't agree with our former Notions, they contradict our old Opinions, or condemn our present Practices, or perhaps they thwart our Honour or Interest, we shall be exposed to Shame or Hardship, or Loss in professing them, or we must change our Party if we believe them, or finally

nally because we do not at present see the Way fully to reconcile them with some other Things which we have received and believe to be true. Now if the Mind be under any of these Influences, and therefore delay and deny its Assent to plain Evidence, it may become criminal in the Sight of God, for hearkening to any one of these Prejudices, rather than to the plain divine Discoveries of Truth, when 'tis proposed either by the Light of Reason or Revelation.

I might here make Use of the very same Similitude, that is mentioned in the Objection, and shew how a Man may see an Object, even tho' it be placed in a dusky Light, when he is very desirous of seeing it, and when he uses the utmost Vigour and Effort of his Eye-sight for this Purpose: And on the other Hand, if he does not exert his visive Powers with Vigour, if he will wink a little, or will turn his Eyes aside, or raise a Dust before the Object, he may be said not to see it; but the true Reason is, because the Object upon some Account or other is displeasing, and he is unwilling to see it. Now if the Life of this Man depended on his seeing and laying hold of this Object, he must die without Hope and without Pity: 'Tis in vain for him to pretend, that he did not see it, when either he winked a little, or raised a Dust about it, and thus

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thus abused the Day Light, and prevented his own Sight of the only Object that could save him.

In such important Concerns as the Affairs of eternal Salvation, let our Infidels take Heed that this be not their Case. *Jesus* the Son of God is the Object proposed to them, to lay hold of as their only Refuge from Death and Hell, and the Light is so strong in which it is set, that Thousands of wise, rational and cautious Men have seen it, and embraced it, and found Salvation: Let them take Heed therefore of winking in the Day-light, and of raising a Dust by wanton and unreasonable Cavils; let them examine the secret Workings of their Souls with the strictest Care; for if it should be found hereafter, that there was external Light and Evidence enough for their Conviction, and the Fault lay only in their Prejudices or their Unattention, this will justly expose them to the terrible and condemning Sentence of God.

QUESTION III.

IS not Sincerity * in the Practice of what we believe, of much more Importance in Religion, than the Truth of our Opinions?

* By *Sincerity in Practice* I here understand, a performing the Duties of Religion, according to the best of our present Knowledge, and the utmost of our Abilities.

Is not Sincerity even in the Practice of a true Religion, the only Thing acceptable to God therein? and if there be the same Sincerity in the Practice of a false Religion, surely God will accept of Man's sincere Endeavours to serve him, and will easily pardon and pass by all his Ignorance, his Errors and Mistakes.

Answ. I. Tho' Sincerity be a necessary Ingredient in all the Practices of true Religion that can be acceptable to God, yet 'tis not *Sincerity alone* that is made the Term of our Justification and Acceptance in the Constitution of the Gospel, but *Faith in Jesus Christ*, or Trust in the Mercy of God thro' *Jesus* the Mediator. *Moses describes the Righteousness of the Law*, that is, the Way of Justification by the Covenant of Works, (as it is figured out to us in the external legal Covenant of Sinai) in this Manner, Rom. x. 5. *The Man that doth these Things shall live in them: But the Righteousness of Faith which we preach*, (saith the Apostle) that is, the Way of Justification and Salvation under the Gospel, *speaks thus*, If thou shalt confess with thy Mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy Heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation, v. 8, 9, 10. So Rom. i. 16, 17. *The Gospel is the Power of God to Salva-*
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tion to every one that believeth, for it is written, the Just shall live by his Faith. Mark xvi. 16. He that believes shall be saved. Eph. ii. 8, 9. By Grace ye are saved thro' Faith; and that not of your selves, it is the Gift of God. Not of Works lest any Man should boast. Neither Abraham nor David amongst the Jews, were justified by Works, but by Faith, i. e. not by the sincerest Works of Righteousness, which they themselves performed, but by Trust in the divine Mercy, according to the Revelations of it in their various Ages, and in various Degrees. Rom. iv. 3, 4, 5, 6. Blessed is the Man to whom God imputeth Righteousness without Works. To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the Ungodly, his Faith is accounted for Righteousness, i. e. his Faith or Dependence on the pardoning Mercy of God thro' a Mediator, is the only appointed Way of obtaining Justification: 'Tis not his own Works, (for he has none sufficient for this End:) but his Trust in that God who justifies and accepts the Ungodly, i. e. Persons who have no sufficient Godliness for their Justification: The only Thing that Man can do, which shall be imputed or reckoned to him in order to his Justification, is his Faith or Trust in the Mercy of God, who justifies us freely, (without any Merit of our own Works in our Justification:) and he doth this by virtue of the Redemption that is

in Christ. This is the Sense of this Verse, according to the whole Scope and Design of the fourth Chapter; for the very Design and Scope of it is to shew the self-emptying *Nature* of that Faith by which we must be justified, as the Design of the fifth Chapter, is to declare the *Object* of it, *Jesus Christ.* This is the Language of the New Testament, this is the Appointment of the Gospel.

I grant indeed, that the Gospel requires also Repentance, and sincere Submission and Obedience to the Will of God revealed in his Word, as well as trusting in *Jesus Christ*, if ever we would be accepted of God, and obtain Heaven: And there are many substantial and indispensable Reasons for it in the Oeconomy of the Gospel. 'Tis the very Design of the Gospel to recover Men to Holiness, by a Sense of pardoning Grace: *We are accepted in the Beloved, that we may be holy, and without Blame before God in Love, Eph. i. 4.* We are not fitted for Salvation, and the heavenly Blessedness, unless we are sanctified: *Without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord, Heb. xii. 14.* We cannot evidence our own Faith to be true and saving, unless it abide in us as the Spring of all good Works. 'Tis only *Faith that works by Love*, that is available to eternal Life, *Gal. v. 6.* Therefore those that have believed must remember, that they are *redeemed from an evil World*, as well as from Hell: They
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are redeemed from a vain Conversation, as well as from Guilt and Misery, that they may be a peculiar People unto God zealous of good Works. But all this will not prove that Sincerity in our Works of Obedience to God, is the appointed Term of our Pardon of Sin, our Justification or Acceptance in the Sight of God under the Gospel, without Faith or Trust in *Jesus Christ*, as the great Mediator and Reconciler. Still our Acceptance with God is eminently referred to Faith, and that as it stands distinct from Works, tho' it must be such a living Faith as is the Spring of Holiness.

But to bring the Matter as low as possible, suppose it should be allowed, (as some contend) that our sincere Endeavours to serve God by Works of Holiness, should be joined with our Faith in *Christ*, as the Condition of our Pardon, and should be made the very Matter of our justifying Righteousness in the New Testament, yet no Man that honestly reads the Scripture, can ever suppose that this Sincerity in our Duties is there made the Term of our Justification, without the Belief of a Mediator, or that it is sufficient to procure Pardon of Sin, and Acceptance with God without Faith in *Christ*, i. e. where the Gospel is preached with its clear Proofs and Evidences.

And now as we have considered the Way of Salvation by Faith, as it is described in

the Gospel, and seen the Promises made to it, so let us also take a short Review of the Threatnings that stand bent and pointed against those who refuse this only Way of Salvation. *John iii. 18. He that believeth not on the Son of God is condemned already, because he hath not believed, ver. 36. He shall not see Life, the Wrath of God abideth on him. Mark xvi. 16. He that believeth not shall be damned. 1 John v. 10, 12, He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the Witness in himself: He hath eternal Life begun in him; but he that hath not the Son hath not Life. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. They who obey not the Gospel, shall be punished with everlasting Destruction, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty Angels in flaming Fire.*

Now surely he is a bold Man that will dare venture his final and eternal State of Happiness or Misery, upon his own Pretences to mere Sincerity, in the Practices of any other Religion whatsoever, in Opposition to such awful Expressions of the Gospel of *Christ*, and especially in such an Age and Nation of Light and Knowledge, where the Gospel appears with so much divine Evidence about it.

Answ. II. If the *Heathen* or *Infidel* Nations, with all their Sincerity, are described in the New Testament as having no Hope of eternal Life, even where the Gospel had not

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not been publish'd, surely much less Ground is there for Hope, where the Gospel is known and refused. Consider a little what Sort of Descriptions the Spirit of God gives of the *Heathen* World, because they were without a divine Revelation, and without the Gospel, either in a *Jewish* or in a *Christian* Form. Eph. ii. 12. *They were without Christ, Strangers from the Covenants of Promise, having no Hope, and without God in the World.* Eph. iv. 8. *Alienated from the Life of God thro' the Ignorance that is in them.* Col. i. 21. *Alienated from God, and Enemies in their Minds by wicked Works, &c.* Read the dismal Corruption and wretched State of the *Heathen* World more at large, Rom. i. 29, 30, 31. Eph. ii. 1, 2 3. Now if the *Heathen* Nations are said to be utter *Strangers to God*, to be *without God*, and to be *without Hope*, because they are without any Gospel, without Christ and without the *Promises*, even tho' these Things had never been revealed to them, much more shall Persons who live in a Land of Gospel-light, be pronounced to be *without God* and *without Hope*, if they refuse to believe in *Jesus Christ*, who has been revealed to them, and whom they have been taught to know from their very Cradles. What Hope can they have who shut their Eyes against the Light that shines so gloriously round about them? Whatsoever mollifying Sense may be put upon some
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severe Expressions of Scripture, in Favour of the *Heathens*, who never had the Gospel, surely there is none will be allowed to those who have so blasphemed and abused it.

Answ. III. If Sincerity in the Practice of a false Religion were sufficient to procure the divine Favour, then ridiculous and inhuman Superstitions of all Kinds, Blood and Murder, and Cruelty, would be effectual Means to obtain the Favour of God; for these have been practised by many People in the World, and that with great Zeal and Sincerity, and sometimes as a Piece of religious Worship.

Can you imagine, that the ancient *Heathens* were not sincere in the Practice of their Ceremonies, in their laborious and painful Rites of Worship, when they put themselves to so much Self-denial and Torment in the Performance of them? Think of the dreadful and bloody Penances to which some of them have devoted themselves: Think of their cutting and wounding of their own Flesh with Knives and Lancets: So did the Prophets of *Baal*, whether they were *Jews* or *Heathens*, 1 *Kings* viii. 18. Think of the Agonies of Parents, when they offered their own Children to brazen Idols, and burnt them in terrible Sacrifice to *Moloch*: Count over the *Thousands of Rams*, and the *Rivers of Wine and Oyl*, the *Fruit of their Body for their Transgression*,

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and the first-born of their Flesh for the Sin of their Soul. Think of *Curtius* and the *Decii* among the old *Romans*, that devoted themselves to Death to appease the Anger of the Gods. Think of the wretched Devotees at present in *Malabar*, who throw themselves under the Chariot Wheels of an heavy Idol drawn by an hundred Men, that they may be crush'd to Death, and thus pay Honour to their God; survey all these, and then tell me whether these Worshipers are not sincere or no. What have you to shew as Signals and Tokens of your Sincerity in Religion, comparable to these poor blind Heathens? And yet after all, can you ever suppose these bloody and dreadful Works of Devotion, these consecrated Acts of Murder, were acceptable to the great God, or could procure Peace with Heaven, under a Pretence of their Sincerity?

Let us survey another Scene of Madness, which yet appears to be sincere Zeal among some of the profest Enemies of the People of God in all Ages. When they have been sending *Christians* to the Lyons, to Slaughter, and Death, when they have given up the beloved Sons and Daughters of God to Fire and Sword, to Famine and Nakedness, to the Teeth and Talons of wild Beasts; some of these Bigots seem to have been sincere in their Designs to honour the Powers of Heaven, and to offer these
barbarous

barbarous Sacrifices to appease the God of their Country. The Romans imagin'd that the Toleration of *Christians*, who were Blasphemers of their Gods, brought Plagues and Distresses upon their Armies and Kingdoms, and therefore they devoted them to Death to please the God whom they worshipt.

Now will any of our *Deists* tell us, that these inhuman Persecutors were accepted of God, and in the Way to his Favour and eternal Life? and yet we have our Saviour's own Word for it, *John xvi. 2. Whosoever killeth you will think he doth God Service; that is, he sincerely thinks so.*

I grant *Christ* foretells this eminently concerning the *Jews*: The unbelieving *Jews* persecuted the *Christians* even to Death, in the Sincerity of their Zeal for God, and dy'd their Hands in the Blood of *Christians*, in order to render themselves more acceptable to the God of *Israel*. St. Paul himself tells you, that he was one of them. *Acts xxvi. 9, 10. I verily thought with my self, that I ought to do many Things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. Many of the Saints did I shut up in Prison, and when they were put to Death, I gave my Voice against them. I punished them often in every Synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to strange Cities. And Gal. i. 13, 14. Being exceedingly zealous of the Traditions*
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of my Fathers, I did persecute the Church of God beyond Measure, and wasted it, Phil. iii.

6. If I may speak of my Zeal, I have sufficient Proof of that, being a Persecutor of the Church. Was Paul in the Way to obtain divine Favour by such cruel and inhuman Methods as these? Could such guilty Practices against his Fellow-Creatures render him a worthy Object of the divine Love or obtain for him eternal Life, because he was sincere in them? It has been sometimes observed, that Persons under the unhappy Influence of these evil Principles of Religion, have grown up to be most fierce and barbarous Murderers, in Proportion to their Sincerity and Zeal: But surely they are not accepted with God in Proportion to these bloody Practices.

That sincere Zeal in a false Religion will not obtain Justification in the Sight of God, is sufficiently declared by the Apostle Paul, to all that believe the Scriptures: For he pronounces concerning himself, that he was the Chief of Sinners upon this Account, (*viz.*) his zealous persecuting the Christians, 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. And that he did but just obtain pardoning Mercy because he did it ignorantly; but he does not pretend to the least Claim of Merit on the Account of his sincere Zeal. He bears Witness also concerning the Jews his Country Men, that they had a Zeal for God, tho' 'twas a blind one, and without Knowledge, Rom. x. 2. They followed after Righteousness,

ousness, i. e. to obtain Justification by the Works of the Law, *but they did not attain to the Law of Righteousness*, i. e. they could not find Justification or Acceptance with God in their Way of Procedure, *because they sought it not by Faith*, Rom. ix. 31, 32, 33. or in the appointed Way of the Gospel.

Answ. IV. If Sincerity in the Practice of a false Religion were sufficient to entitle us to the Favour of God, yet no Person can lay Claim to the Favour of God on this Account, since I may venture to say, No Man ever was constantly sincere in practising every Point and Tittle of what his Conscience directed him to, and required of him as his Duty. 'tis very possible, that a Man may be sincere in some single Actions of Life or Worship, who is greatly defective as to his Sincerity in other Parts of his Behaviour. Where is the Man that can stand up and say, "I have constantly served God to the utmost of my Knowledge: I have loved him with all my Heart: I have loved my Neighbour as far as Conscience told me I ought to do, and fulfilled every Duty to God and Man, as far as I knew it, and was able to perform it, and that without any wilful Transgression or Negligence?" I am verily persuaded, no Man can say, his own Conscience has always excused him, tho' in many Actions Men may have been justified to their own Consciences. Now if Men will

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will venture to build their eternal Hopes upon this Presumption of God's Acceptance of their Sincerity, even where their Religion is not true, let them see to it, that they sincerely and constantly fulfil their own invented Law of Righteousness: Let them take Care that their honest and sincere Obedience to their own Light be continual, uniform and complete; or else they may justly expect that God and their own Consciences will come upon them one Day with dreadful Demands*.

Ans. V. Suppose it were granted, that the *sincere Practices* of a mistaken or false Religion, could render us accepted of God, and suppose yet further, that we could be perfectly sincere in this Practice, without one Failure, yet we ought to enquire whether we have been *sincere also in our Search after the true Religion*: For if we have failed here, and been negligent and careless in our Search after the right Way to please

* Perhaps it will be said, that *Sincerity* does not imply such an uninterrupted Constancy of Obedience as I represent, but that it is consistent with some Failures in Point of known Duty, if these Failures be attended with hearty Repentance and a Resolution of future Care and Watchfulness.

To this I *answer*, that the Gospel and the Revelations of Grace in Scripture allow this Sort of Sincerity, and accept of hearty Repentance after Sin, thro' the Interest of a Mediator: But the Light of Nature doth not allow of any Sincerity in Obedience, if it be interrupted by one wilful Sin; for the Light of Nature can never assure us, that any one wilful and known Sin will be pardoned, nor that any Repentance will be accepted. The Discovery of this is pure Grace.

God, our greatest Sincerity in a false Way can pretend to no Merit, and can give us but little Hope. It is not an irrational and thoughtless Sincerity, an ignorant and stupid Zeal in a mistaken Religion that came to us by Chance, or that we slightly took up from a Principle of Sloth, or were led into by culpable Prejudices, that can ever make a just Pretence to the Favour of God : And therefore if we should allow, that in the darkest Nations of the Earth, where Men have scarce any Advantages for Knowledge, God would accept of their sincere Follies and Superstitions, yet we have no Reason to expect it in a Land of such Light and Knowledge, where we have the greatest Advantages to be informed of the true Way of Worship.

The great God who made all the Powers of our Nature, expects the Use of our Understandings to enquire out Truth and Duty, as well as the Activity of our Will and Affections, and our lower Powers to practise it. He expects that we should give Diligence to search and find out the true Religion in the midst of such rich Advantages, as his Providence has conferred upon us. He gives us no Indulgence to go on in the Practice of a false Religion, and hope for the Pardon of our Sloth and Negligence, and Forgiveness of our thoughtless and stupid Errors, on the mere Pretence of Sincerity

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cerity in the Practice of them. This leads me to the next *Question*.

QUESTION IV.

BUT if I am sincere in seeking out the Truth, shall not my sincere Endeavours to find out the true Religion, and to practise agreeably to my Knowledge obtain Acceptance with God, even tho' I should happen to fall into mistaken Opinions, and practise a false Religion instead of the true?

Ans. I. Sincerity in the Search after Truth, has so many and various Ingredients in it, that I fear the Unbelievers in *Great Britain* would make but a poor Pretence to *Sincerity*, when called before the Bar of the great and righteous God, and would find it a dangerous Thing for them to have built their whole Hopes and Expectations on this Pretence, while they have rejected the Gospel of *Christ* his Son.

The several Qualifications, which are required to make up *Sincerity in the Search of a true Religion*, are as follow,

I. A watchful and diligent disengaging ourselves from all the secret and culpable Prejudices that hang about the Mind, and lead it astray from Truth: A restless and constant Endeavour to free ourselves from every evil Influence, every wrong Biass and Turn of Mind, that might lead the Understanding astray in its Enquiries, or may warp the Judgment
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in its Determinations. Now these are very numerous.

(1.) There are some Prejudices that arise from the Influence of those who are our Superiors, either in Riches or Power, or Wit and Learning, or Years, &c. *Have any of the Rulers believed on him?* was thought to be a good Argument in the Days of *Christ* against his Gospel: And it is an Argument of the same Stamp, which vulgar Souls in our Days make Use of: Are not many of the polite Gentlemen, and fine Wits of the Age weary of Christianity?

(2.) Our Friends or Acquaintance, or Companions, have a strange Influence also upon the Mind, and by their constant Conversation prejudice it for or against particular Opinions. Even a sober Youth who happens to fall into *Heathenish* Acquaintance, by the perpetual Impressions of their vile Discourse, may become a *Heathen* too.

(3.) Some Prejudices arise from the Fear of Ridicule and Shame among our Associates, and those with whom we converse: And many a young Person is turned aside from attending to the Evidences of Christianity, lest he should be made a Jest among his profane Company, if he profess himself a Believer of the Gospel.

(4.) There is sometimes a strong and unhappy Prejudice against the Religion of *Christ*, arising from the Faults and Follies of
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of those who profess to be *Christians*: These Disciples of Infidelity never consider that Follies and Faults of as heinous and criminal a Kind, are daily practised by their Fellow-Infidels: The old *Heathen* Philosophers who professed the Religion of Nature, were shamefully guilty of many Vices contrary to the Dictates of natural Reason, and yet the Religion of Nature is true and good still, so far as it goes: And *Christianity* may be divinely true notwithstanding the Iniquity and Madness of some that pretend to profess it.

(5.) Another Set of Prejudices arises from Pride of Mind and Self-conceit, presuming that the Reason of Man is sufficient to direct itself in the Paths of Happiness, without receiving any Discoveries from God.

'Tis Pride also that suffers us not to submit to receive the Doctrines of Revelation, when there is any Thing in them that we know not presently how to reconcile and explain: And this Spirit of Pride and Arrogance tempts some of the Deists to abandon all their Bible, because the Word of God contains some deep Things in it which are not fully understood by Men.

(6.) Sometimes an Affectation of Novelty warps the Mind aside, and leads it astray in its Enquiries after Truth, and for this very Reason some Men do hardly receive the Doctrine which has been the ancient Faith of their Ancestors.

Ancestors. New Things have a strange and subtle Influence to allure the Heart away from old Truths.

(7.) The Pride of thinking freely for our selves, and throwing off all the Bonds and Fetters of Education, has had a licentious and unhappy Influence on some Minds, to lead them off to Infidelity. They scorn to follow the Dictates of Tutors, and renounce the best of Religions, because they were born and bred in it.

(8.) There is another Set of Prejudices that arise from the Lusts of the Flesh. *Christianity* seems to have too much Strictness in it for those Men who would give themselves a Loose to sensual Delights: And thus their own vicious Inclinations darken their Understandings: First they secretly wish and desire that a Doctrine so self-denying may not be true, and then they are easily led to fancy and pronounce there is no Truth in it. Every slight Turn of Wit, and faint Colour of Reason, is sufficient to carry off their Minds from the Gospel, whose Passions are carried off already.

(9.) And it may be there are others who are under the Influence of this wicked Prejudice, (*viz.*) "I have begun to cast off Christianity, and therefore I will go on: I have declared my self a Free-thinker, and I cannot go back." On this Account they harden themselves in their Unbelief, and

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and they are unwilling to hearken or attend to any Reason or Evidence that might make them Believers, or incline them to receive the Gospel, after they have once given up their Name and Honour to Infidelity.

Now these and other *Prejudices* of the Mind must be all laid aside, before we can pretend to such perfect *Sincerity in the Search after Truth*, as will justify us at the Bar of God in the Choice and Practice of a false Religion *. And tho' in the main we may have a real Design to find out the true Religion, yet which of us will dare to venture our everlasting Hopes upon a mere Presumption of our Freedom from all these evil Influences, these faulty Prejudices that stick so close to Mankind? I am ready to

* Since these Papers were in the Press I met with a Paragraph in Dr. Harris's excellent Discourses of the *Reasonableness of believing*, &c. which I take Pleasure to transcribe here.
"The sincere and upright will always readily embrace the divine Revelation. Whatsoever Prejudices and Mistakes they may labour under from the Weakness of their Understanding, and the Impressions of Education, as soon as ever they discern the Evidence of it, they will resign to the superior Claims of Truth, against every lower Consideration or remaining Difficulty and Doubt. Shew them that it is the Will of God, and they readily yield and submit. When the insincere on the other Hand, governed by their Interests and other Prejudices, will reject the plainest Truths and greatest Evidence, which is against their Interest, and they will start little Cavils, and raise endless Objections, and fortify their Minds against the strongest Evidence, to support some Shadow of false Quiet, and appear Infidels upon Principle: Or else without allowing themselves to reason about it, they will bear it down by mere Force, and oppose it with Violence and Malice of Heart, which was the Case of the unbelieving Jews."

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persuade my self that there are not many of the *Deists* and *Infidels* in this Nation, who examine their Hearts closely in this Matter, and after all can pronounce themselves most sincere and unbiaſſed Searchers of the Truth.

II. Another Qualification requisite to Sincerity, is an *heartly inward Sollicitude about these important Concerns*; a *fervent and longing Desire of the Soul to find out the Knowledge of God, and the right Way to Salvation*. 'Tis not a cold Wish or two after divine Truth, once now and then, that is sufficient to prove a Man sincere in his Enquiries. A sincere Soul will feel an inward and penetrating Concern agreeable to the momentous Subject. There are too many who content themselves with a general unaffected Consciousness, that they are willing to find out the Truth, but this Design makes no answerable Impression upon their Spirits as a Matter of prime Importance and of infinite Concern.

III. Sincerity requires also a *laborious Diligence in searching after the Knowledge of the Truth, an industrious Use of every Help possible to be attain'd in our Station and Circumstances*. It implies a due Attention to every Argument, and giving them their full Weight; a seizing every Beam of Light honestly,

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honestly, as soon as it appears to the Mind, as a Man that *seeks after hidden Treasure*, would chearfully receive every Hint of Discovery, would follow the first Glimmerings of the Gold or Silver Oar, and trace out the rich Vein through the Bowels of the Earth.

If we would prove our selves sincere, we must not be tired or discouraged by a few Obstacles in our Way. We must *search for Wisdom as Silver, and dig for Understanding as for hidden Treasures*, Prov. ii. 5. *Then shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God.*

Whereas many of our modern Infidels, when in their Searches they find a dark Sentence, and a few Difficulties in the Language of Scripture, they labour not after a Solution of them, but gladly lay hold of every Objection, and content themselves with these little Cavils as a sufficient Argument to reject it all at once, to abandon the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, *Christ* and his Gospel. Such a Temper and Spirit, such a cavilling and contentious Practice, will fly in the Face of a Man when he shall pretend to plead *Sincerity* before God.

IV. *Perseverance in this honest and diligent Enquiry* is another Ingredient of a sincere Search after Truth. 'Tis not the Work of an Hour or two, or the Labour of a few

Days; but according to our State and Circumstances in the World, we must continually search till we have found some solid Satisfaction, and till our Minds can rest in some Doctrines of Religion, upon just and reasonable Grounds. *Hosea vi. 3. Then shall ye know the Lord, if ye follow on to know him.*

V. Sincerity in searching out the Truth requires also great Humility and Meekness of Spirit, a holy Sense of the Importance of this Enquiry, a Consciousness of our own Weakness, and of the many Prejudices, the false Lights and the Dangers that attend and surround us both within and without in our Enquiries, together with constant and importunate Prayer to God for his Assistance. All these are necessary Ingredients of such a Sincerity in the Search after true Religion, as will approve itself to God. We must not be self-sufficient and conceited of our reasoning Powers, but under a Sense of our Weakness and Danger of Mistake, we must be instant Petitioners daily at the Throne of God, that he would not suffer any delusive Prejudice to blind our Minds, nor well colour'd Errors to lead us astray; that he would order all Things in the Course of his Providence in so favourable a Manner, as may tend to guide us into the Path of Truth.

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A sincere Enquirer is able to appeal to God who knows all Things, "Thou seest
" the honest Desire of my Soul, and the
" sincere, inward and intense Breathings of
" my Heart, to find out the Way to thy
" Favour: All my Desire is to know and
" please thee my Creator, and therefore I
" daily seek thy Directions." We must not
only *incline our Ears to Wisdom, and apply
our Heart to Understanding*, but we must *cry
after Knowledge, and lift up our Voice to Hea-
ven. Prov. ii. 3, 6. For it is the Lord who
giveth Wisdom.*

VI. It belongs also to a sincere Search
after Truth, that we are *careful and zealous
in the Practice of every Thing, that we have
already found out in Religion.* All the Duties
toward God and Man, that Reason and na-
tural Light discover to us, must be fulfilled
by us with a holy and religious Industry
and Watchfulness: And we must with a
constant Jealousy and Sollicitude of Soul,
abstain from every Thing that would dis-
please God. 'Tis for the Righteous that God
*layeth up sound Wisdom, Prov. ii. 7. He giveth
to those that are good in his Sight Wisdom and
Knowledge, Eccles. ii. 26.* And our blessed
Lord himself tells us, *John vii. 17. If any
Man will do his Will, he shall know of the
Doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I
speak of my self.* Doing the Will of God as
fast

fast as it is known, is a necessary Requisite in order to obtain farther Knowledge.

Now when our modern *Deists* have fulfilled all these *Rules of Sincerity in their Search* after the true Way of Salvation, I am verily persuaded they will continue no longer in their Infidelity, but rejoice to receive the Gospel of Christ.

However it will be Time enough for them to make their own Pretences of Sincerity in the Search after Truth, the Ground of their Expectations of divine Favour, and to plead it at the Bar of God, when they have carefully practised all this *Sincerity*, which has been now described.

And yet if any should boldly declare they have practised all this Sincerity, and yet they are not convinced of the Truth of the Gospel; before I quit this Head I would address my self to them with one Enquiry more, and that is, If you imagine that you are now truly sincere in your present Search, *have you been always thus sincere in your Enquiries ever since you began to doubt of Christianity?* Have you not indulged such an immoral Conduct, such Sensuality, such a Love to vicious Pleasures, such Pride of your own Reason, such Self-sufficiency, such a bantering Spirit, such Lusts of the Flesh, or Lusts of the Mind, such criminal Prejudices or such guilty Practices as may have provoked God to punish you one of these

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these two Ways, (1.) Either in the Course of his Providence *to take away those Means and Advantages for Knowledge, which you have once enjoyed and abused:* Or (2.) *To withdraw all the common Influences of his holy Spirit, and leave you to the Weaknesses and Wandrings of your own Spirits, and to give you up to a judicial Blindness, even tho' the outward Means of Knowledge may remain?*

There are many amongst the ancient Gentiles, and many amongst the later Worshipers of *Anti-Christ*, who have fallen under these just and heavy Judgments. There have been Men who *held the Truth in Unrighteousness*, and would not practise Religion so far as they knew it, nor glorify God so far as they were acquainted with him; and they have been given up to vain Imaginations, *their foolish Heart has been darkned; professing themselves to be wise they became Fools instead of Philosophers:* They became ridiculous Idolaters, and worship'd *Birds and Beasts, and creeping Things*, instead of God. The righteous God gave them over to a reprobate Mind, *because they did not like to retain him in their Knowledge*, Rom. i. 18, &c.

There have been many *Jews and Heathens* who have had the Gospel preached to them with sufficient Evidence; but when they had refused to receive it, the Ministry of the Gospel has been taken away from them, the Apostles and Preachers have been called
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off from such an unfruitful Spot of Ground, and have left that Town, that Country or Nation in double Darkness. See the History of the Gospel, and the *Acts of the Apostles*. Our Saviour threatned this Judgment to the unbelieving *Jews*, and it has been executed not only on them, but on other Sorts of Infidels besides.

Or if the Means of Knowledge have continued among them, yet they have been forsaken of God, and given up to Blindness of Mind. This also seems to have been the Punishment of Multitudes of the *Jewish* Nation. And St. Paul foretells the same terrible Judgment upon some degenerate Parts of the Christian World. *Because they received not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved, God shall send them strong Delusions that they shall believe a Lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the Truth, but had Pleasure in Unrighteousness,* 2 Thess. ii. 10. This has been evidently fulfilled in some Members of the *Anti-Christian* Church.

Now if this be the Case, there is Need of deep Repentance for past Insincerity and Negligence: There is Need of great Humiliation of Soul before an offended God, in order to make up the Character of present Sincerity: There is Need of strong Cries and Prayers for pardoning Grace for the Time past, as well as for present Light and Assistance in all further Enquiries after the Truth.

Thus

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Thus I have gone through the several *Requisites of Sincerity*, which the great Judge of all may require and demand at the Hands of every one who rejects the Gospel under Pretence of its insufficient Evidence. And I think upon the whole, it appears to be a very dangerous Venture for those that renounce the Religion of *Christ*, in our Age and Nation, to trust entirely to this Pretence of Sincerity in their Enquiries; since I fear upon a strict Examination their Pretences will be found very defective and insufficient.

QUESTION V.

BUt if God insist upon such severe Terms in judging of our Sincerity, then no *Christian* can be saved any more than a *Deist* or an *Unbeliever*: For without Sincerity in a true Religion, you grant there is no Salvation. But may not a *Deist* be as sincere and upright as a *Christian*, both in the searching out his Religion, and in the Practice of it? The great God who created us, knows the Frailty of our Natures, he sees the Prejudices with which we are surrounded, and the Weaknesses to which we are continually exposed, and if he will make Allowances to *Christians* in the Practice of their Religion, why may we not suppose his merciful Nature will incline him to

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make the same compassionate Allowances to the *sincere* and *honest Infidels*, while they are seeking after the right Way to please him.

I answer, I. The Light of Evidence and the Force of Argument wherewith the Gospel is surrounded in the present Age, seems to me to be so strong and convincing, that I cannot but say there is great Reason to doubt, whether in the enlightned Towns and Cities of *Great Britain*, there can any Man live and die an *honest and sincere Unbeliever*, i. e. whether any Man who hath a Mind sincerely ready to submit to Evidence, and hath used his utmost Diligence in searching out the Truth, can always remain a profest Infidel; this I have intimated before, and I shall give the Reasons of this Opinion more plainly under the next Question.

But I proceed now to a second Answer thus. The *Christian* who feels and mourns over the Weakness of human Nature, the Strength and Bias of the Passions, the powerful Prejudices which stand round us, and the many Frailties that attend and defile our best Endeavours, has greatly the Advantage of the *Infidel* in this Case. For the Bible, which we believe to be the Word of God, is the Book of his Grace, and there he has promised Favour to the upright, he has taught us what a Door of Mercy he has opened

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opened for Repentance under our returning Frailties, and what compassionate Allowances he will make for the Transgressions and Failings, and lamented Weaknesses of those who are in the main sincere and diligent in their Service of God; and 'tis in these Promises the *Christian* finds Hope: But the Light of Nature and Reason, which is the only Hope and Refuge of the *Deist*, can never give solid Rest and Peace to his Soul, under a Sense of these Frailties; for it cannot assure him that God will make any of these Allowances, or that he will accept of any Repentance.

The great and holy God, who sees all the vicious Turnings of our Spirits, (whether we be *Deists* or *Christians*) and who beholds all the criminal Inclinations and false Biasses which our Minds have indulged, can discover all these in a glaring Light to the Eye of our Souls, and lay us under the evident and heavy Condemnation of our own Consciences. Now when this is done, the *Deist* being made deeply sensible of the Defects and Flaws of his own Sincerity *throughout* the Course of his Life, has nothing to plead or hope but unpromised and uncovenanted Mercy: The *Christian* sees and confesses himself guilty before God, repents and mourns over his Wandrings, and flies to the Promises of Mercy, and to the Covenant of Hope. *If thou, O Lord, shouldst*

mark Iniquities, O Lord, who can stand? but there is Forgiveness with thee, and the Blood of Jesus cleanseth from all Sin: But the Deist has no such Promise of favourable Allowances, no Hope in this atoning Blood: He has renounced the sacred Promises of Grace, and refused the Blood that was shed to make Atonement.

QUESTION VI.

ARE there not some *Deists* that have taken more Pains in the Search of true Religion, than the greatest Part of *Christians* have ever done? *Christians* in our Age receive the Religion of *Christ*, from their Education, they owe their Christianity to their being born in *Great Britain* in this Age of the World, when the whole Nation is Christian: But the *Deists* are the Men of Enquiry into the *Grounds and Reasons* of what they believe. If Sincerity in the Practice of a true Religion, which came to us by Education, will save one from the Wrath of God, and yet the same Degree of Sincerity in our Enquiries after Truth, will not save another if he happen to mistake the true Religion, and light upon a false one, then it is entirely owing to Chance, or to pure divine Favour, that a Man happens to be saved: There is no Worthiness nor Honour belongs to the *Christian*, that he is in the right Way, nor has he any Merit
above

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above the *Infidel*. At least may it not be justly so pronounced concerning those *Christians*, who never search'd into the Grounds of their Religion, but took it up entirely from their Education?

Answ. I. One might reply to this Reasoning partly by Way of Concession, and say thus, If this Objection were left in its full Force, so far as to ascribe the Salvation of Christians to *pure divine Favour without Merit*, I don't see any evil Consequence from it: For it is the Design of God in his Gospel that Man should not have the Praise or Merit of his own Salvation ascribed to himself, but that *he that glories should glory in the Lord*, and that all the Honour of our Salvation and Happiness should be attributed to God alone. We are all Sinners in the Sight of God: *There is none righteous, no, not one*: And if by the secret Methods of his Providence and special Favour, he has train'd up some Persons in the Knowledge and Belief of the Truth, without much Enquiry or Labour of their own in searching for it, and if he has by his own Spirit wrought powerfully in their Hearts, and made this Religion in which they were educated effectual to change their corrupt Natures, to form their Hearts and Lives to Holiness, and to fit them for the heavenly World, let his Name and his Grace be for ever ador'd. *Who is it has made us*
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to differ? What have we, even the best of us, that we have not received? 1 Cor. iv. 7. This is the Language which the Word of God teaches: For the Time and Place and Family wherein we were born, all the outward and inward Helps we enjoy, all the Advantages which we have above others, are owing entirely to rich and free Mercy, and therefore God will not allow his People any Room or Ground for boasting.

It is evident to the World, and must be universally acknowledged, that the great God, the Maker and Lord of all, may appoint the Birth and Habitation of his Creatures in what Nation, in what Household, on what Spot of Earth he pleases; and yet this very Appointment will make a vast Difference between some Mortals and others in their Advantages for Knowledge and Salvation. Now if this almighty and sovereign God in the Course of his Providence, please to give me a Birth in *Great Britain*, where the Religion of *Jesus* is profest, and give Birth to others in the Wilds of *America*, where the true God is not known, what Injustice is there in his Conduct? If he train me up by the divine Impressions of his Grace in the Religion which I received from my Christian Fathers, to a Fitness for the heavenly World, while the *American* Savages are left almost as ignorant as the Brutes, thro' their own universal Neglect to improve their

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their reasoning Powers, *who shall say unto God, what dost thou?* Let my Soul adore him with all humble Thankfulness, and with ardent Love for his distinguishing Mercy, and leave the Judge of all the Earth to account with the *Americans*: He will do them no Wrong.

Ans. II. But in the second Place I answer, however some *Deists* may have been more laborious in their Search after the true Religion, than several *Christians* have been, who have believed the Gospel at first because their Parents taught them so, yet I believe it will never be found that any *Deist* who has renounced the Gospel, has arisen to those Degrees of sincere Piety, in his Devotion toward God, and sincere Love to his Fellow-creatures, as these *Christians* have arrived at.

Doubtless there are many Believers in the Name of *Christ*, who were never acquainted with any of the Principles or Objections of the *Deists*, who never had any Scruple in their Thoughts about the Truth of Christianity, and never troubled themselves to search whether their Religion were true or no: But the Grace of God has made the Belief of this Religion in which they were born and educated, effectual to change their Hearts, to sanctify their Natures, to make them hate every Sin, to draw out their Love to God and their Neighbour, to fill them

them with every Virtue and every pious Disposition, and to fit them for the sacred Employment and the Blessedness of Heaven: And this is an inward, a solid and rational Testimony and Evidence of the divine Original of Christianity, as I have proved at large in the several first Discourses both of my first and second Volumes of Sermons, publish'd some Years ago. This inward Experience of the sanctifying Power of the Gospel, especially where it rises to a high Degree, is a just, an effectual, and constraining Conviction to them, that the Gospel of *Christ* is true. *He that believes has the Witness in himself*, 1 John v. 10. These *Christians*, even tho' of the meaner and lower Rank of Understanding, arrive at such divine Virtues as the *Deist* with all his Pretences to Reason and Knowledge never arrived at. Thus the great God honours the sacred Religion, that he has given to Men with the Produce of that sincere Piety, in plain, humble, and unlearned Christians, which is not to be found amongst Infidels: Hereby their Faith is confirmed, and hereby they are fitted for the heavenly Felicity.

Answ. III. But to cut off all other Pretences at once, I think we may dare to affirm, (as I have intimated before) that if any Disbeliever of the Gospel of *Christ* in *Great Britain*, with his utmost Labour of
Soul,

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Soul, with great Watchfulness, Humility, and fervent Prayer, seeks after the Knowledge of the Truth by all proper Means, and at the same Time practises with an exact and careful Conscience all the Duties that he can find out by the Light of Reason, he will certainly be led into the Belief of the Truth: He will have such abundant Evidence of the Gospel of *Christ* given to him, as shall turn him from an *Infidel* into a *Christian*, and I give these Reasons for it.

I. God himself has promised in his Word, that a diligent, humble, and faithful Enquirer after true *Wisdom*, i. e. Religion, and the Knowledge of God shall not be disappointed, but shall obtain his End. This is the evident Purport and Intent of several Scriptures cited before, *Prov. ii. Eccles. ii. &c.* *If thou searchest for Wisdom as for hidden Treasures, and liftest up thy Voice to the Lord for Understanding, then shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord, for he giveth to those that are good in his Sight, Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge, Luke xi. 9, 13. Seek and ye shall find, ask and it shall be given you, John vii. 17. If any Man will do the Will of God, then shall he know concerning the Doctrine of Christ, whether it be of God or no, Jam. i. 5. If any Man want Wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. The blessed God who makes such Promises as*

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these remembers them well, and will not fail to accomplish them to the sincere Enquirer, and the humble Petitioner.

II. God has confirm'd the Religion of his Son *Jesus*, with the awful Sanction of a most dreadful Curse, *He that believeth not shall be damned*: Now an infinitely gracious God will not suffer a humble, zealous and honest Enquirer after himself in the midst of Gospel-light, to run into such pernicious Errors as to incur an eternal Curse. His Mercy therefore will certainly irradiate humble and sincere Souls with a heavenly Sun-beam, and effectually secure them from final Unbelief and Damnation. 'Tis God himself has wrought in them this Honesty of Heart, this sincere Zeal of Enquiry, and he will fulfil the Work of his own Hands, and lead them into Truth and Peace.

III. The Light of Nature, which the *Deist* professes to take for his Guide, if duly followed, will certainly lead him to believe the Gospel: For it will powerfully incline an honest Mind to believe, that a Religion which is so worthy of all the Perfections of God; and so suited to all the Necessities of Man, a Religion so divinely attested by Prophecies before, and by Miracles afterward, and surrounded with other powerful Arguments, must needs come from God; since the Light of Nature assures him, that the God of Truth will never suffer such heavenly

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heavenly Seals to be set to a Falshood or an Imposture: For if it be an Imposture it comes from Hell, and God would never let it bear the manifest Signatures of Heaven.

Upon this View of Things, it appears to me pretty clear and conclusive, that a *Deist* in *Great Britain* who is really sincere, and persevering in his Enquiries after the Truth, will sooner or later become a *Christian*, and that the Mercy of God will never suffer him to live and die an *Infidel*.

QUESTION VII.

“ DO all Unbelievers in all Ages fall
“ under that Sentence of Damnati-
“ on? If we had lived in *Judea* in the Days
“ of *Christ*, and had seen the Miracles with
“ our Eyes which *Christ* is said to have
“ wrought, we might have perhaps found
“ Evidence enough in them to have believed
“ the Gospel: Surely that dreadful Curse,
“ (which you speak of) can be pronounced
“ only against those who *resisted their Eye-*
“ *sight, and would not believe it*: But the
“ Case is quite alter'd at this Distance of
“ Time and Place, when we have only an
“ Account of these Wonders deliver'd down
“ to us in Books, which were said to be
“ done almost 1700 Years ago.” *

* See an undeniable and convincing Proof of the *Reasonableness of believing* the History of the Gospel tho' written so long ago, and the *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*, in an excellent Sermon lately publish'd by Dr. *William Harris*.

To this I answer, it must be granted, that as several of the Miracles of Christ were performed in the Sight of Multitudes, so those Persons who had the Happiness to be Eye and Ear-witnesses of them, in that one Respect, have some Advantage for Faith beyond those who live in distant Ages; But if we should enter into a Detail of this Enquiry, it may be we should find, that the Men of Letters in this Nation, and in our Day, are favoured with more Advantages for Faith, and several other Springs of Evidence which compensate the Loss of that one: And upon the whole Survey and just Balance of Things, comparing their Times with ours, perhaps it would appear, that we in this Age have equal or superior Reasons for the Belief of the Gospel, beyond what most of them enjoy'd, who lived in the Time of *Christ* or his Apostles. To this End let us attend to the following *Considerations*.

Confid. I. Tho' there were several Persons blest with the actual Sight of many of these miraculous Works, yet there were also Multitudes who lived in the Age of Miracles, who perhaps never had Opportunity to be actual Eye-witnesses of one single Miracle wrought by *Christ* or his Apostles. *Herod* had long desired it, and yet it was not granted him, *Luke ix. 9.* Many there
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were who asked our Saviour to *shew them a Sign from Heaven*, but he did not think proper to gratify their Humour, nor was it fit that Signs and Wonders should be made too common: Sometimes he reproves their Curiosity, and calls them *a wicked and adulterous Generation*, probably because he knew their obstinate and cavilling Temper, that they derided his preaching, and did not give due Credit to the many undeniable Reports that were made concerning his Miracles, and therefore he would shew them no new ones.

Observe farther, that as there were many in the Days of *Christ*, who never beheld one of his Miracles actually wrought, so it is most probable there were Multitudes who never saw above one or two of them: There were but comparatively few of the same Persons who happen'd to be often actually present, and were Eye-witnesses of very many of these different Wonders; for tho' they were not done in a Corner, yet they were wrought in distant Towns and Villages, where not a Quarter of the same Persons could be present. As for their Knowledge of the rest of these Miracles, which their own Eyes saw not, it must be convey'd to them by the Report and Testimony of others: And perhaps these Reports might not be always so just, so exact, so authentick as the Narratives which we enjoy, because these were committed to Writing by the Apostles themselves who saw them. It

It is probable also that few of those Persons who lived in the Days of our Saviour, had ever so large, so particular and so complete an Account as we have of all the various Miracles which are transmitted down to us in the Histories of the Gospel.

If then many of them never saw one Miracle, if those who saw one or two, must come at the Knowledge of the rest of the Miracles of *Christ* the same Way that we do, *i. e.* by Report, and if we have a much larger and more complete Account of them than most of the *Jews* were favour'd with, and that by as sure and credible a Report, *i. e.* by the writing of Eye-witnesses, I would humbly enquire whether this may not compensate, if not overbalance their Advantage who liv'd in that Age, even tho' they saw a Miracle or two with their own Eyes.

Surely all that Collection of the miraculous Works of *Christ*, and the Gifts of the blessed Spirit to the Apostles, whereby Wonders were wrought in several Nations for many successive Years, which is convey'd down to us by early and authentick Records which are not charged with Forgery, and which are the surest Preservers of ancient Facts, may at this Distance of Time, lay as strong a Foundation for our Faith, and give as just an Evidence to the Gospel of *Christ*, as the two or three Miracles, or perhaps some single one, which was the most

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most that might be seen by a great Part of their Cotemporaries.

The same Spirit of Cavil and Unbelief, which reigns now in the Hearts of Men, and makes so warm an Opposition to the Light which attends the Gospel in our Day, would in all Probability have vented itself even under the very Blaze and Splendor of these divine Operations. They could have found some Philosophical Contrivance for the Solution of the heavenly Wonder; they could find Reasons to doubt of some of the Circumstances of the Fact; they could suspect that the blind or deaf, or dead Person did not pass under sufficient Scrutiny before he was heal'd or rais'd, that they might be assured he was really deaf, blind or dead. And thus a Miracle or two would not have *convinced their own Eye-sight*. In short, 'tis too evidently true in every Age, what our blessed Saviour says in his Age, that *they who will not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe if one rose from the Dead, Luke xvi. ult.*

But 'tis Time to proceed to the second *Consideration*, to shew that the Men of Enquiry in our Day have probably as strong an Evidence of the Truth of the Gospel, as they might have had if they had lived in the Days of *Christ*.

Confid. II. Let it be observed, that there were some Predictions of the ancient Prophets

phets relating to the Gospel which have been fulfilled since our Saviour went to Heaven: Particularly the Unbelief of the *Jews*, and their being rejected out of God's Favour, and the Multitudes of *Gentiles* flocking in to *Christ*. There have been some Prophecies spoken by our Saviour himself, which have been since accomplish'd in the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Calling of the *Gentile* Church, the Persecutions of the Apostles, the Crucifixion of St. *Peter*, &c. There have been also other Predictions of the Apostles and Apostolick Men fulfilled since that Time, (*viz.*) the Nature, the Principles, and the Rise of *Anti-christ*, which was foretold both by St. *Paul* and St. *John*, the binding of St. *Paul* at *Jerusalem*, the universal Dearth in the Days of *Claudius Cæsar*, both predicted by *Agabus*, &c. All which joined together, give an additional Strength to the Evidence of Christianity in our Day.

Confid. III. Reflect also on the amazing Success of the Gospel among the Nations: How it gain'd surprising Victories over great Men and Philosophers, how it made its Way thro' Armies and Palaces, how it triumph'd over the Opposition of Enemies, the Laws of Princes, the Torments and Terrors of Sword and Fire, the utmost Rage of Men, and the Spite of Devils, over the Craft

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Craft of the Heathen Priests, the Madness and Superstition of the People; and all this without the Force of Arms, without the Powers of human Learning and Rhetorick, without the Baits and Allurements of this Life, and without any of those Aids which are wont to be thought necessary among Men, for the Propagation of a new Religion. Surely this prodigious Success and Victory of the Gospel, can be imputed rationally to nothing else but the Finger of God; and it diffuses a new Brightness and Evidence around the Religion of *Jesus*, beyond what those who lived in the Days of *Christ* could see or know.

Confid. IV. Let it be remember'd too, that this Religion has now stood the Test of the most severe and critical Enquiries of its Adversaries: It has been searched and tried by the Men of Learning and Wit and Reason in the several Nations of the Earth, for almost 1700 Years; and certainly a Religion which has been brought to the Test so often, and past thro' such strict Inquisitions, and yet still maintains its Ground, and that not only among the lower Part of Mankind, but among Men of unbias'd Minds, Freedom of Thought, and equal Sense and Reason to the best of its Enemies, such a Religion (I say) may justly be supposed to

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have acquired some further Strength of Evidence hereby.

Confid. V. To all the other Considerations this may be added, that perhaps the internal and innate Evidences of the Truth of the Gospel, were never set in so powerful and convincing a Light as in the present Age: I mean such as arise from the Excellency of its Doctrines and Precepts, Rules and Motives, from its perfect Conformity to all the Principles of natural Religion, and from its supplying all the Defects thereof, from its happy Correspondence with all the Perfections of God, and its all-sufficient Relief of the Wants and Miseries of fallen Man, from its manifest Tendency to the Honour of God, and the well-being of Man both here and hereafter, above all the Religions that ever were known, believed or profess'd thro' all Ages of the World. I can hardly suppose that ever this Sort of Evidence for Christianity was ever displayed in any former Age, in so large and full, so regular and harmonious a Manner as has been done by some of the ingenious Christian Writers of this Age. And in my Opinion, this Evidence may be accounted equal to the mere Eye-sight of one or two lesser Miracles, at least in the Esteem of the Men of elegant Thought and refin'd Reason, such as our modern Unbelievers would fain appear. Upon

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Upon the Whole, tho' it be granted, that the Evidence of the Gospel of Christ as it stands in our Day, doth not arise quite so high, nor give quite so strong a Foundation for our Faith, as it did for the Faith of the Apostles, who saw most of his mighty Works, and conversed with him, and of some of the *Jews* who had the best Advantages in the Days of *Christ*; yet I can hardly think its present Evidence to be inferior to what the Generality of the *Jews* and *Gentiles* enjoy'd in primitive Times.

But suppose I should not have exactly adjusted those Proportions of Light and Evidence, between former and later Days, yet we must affirm this to the Honour of Christianity and the Gospel, (and we may do it with Justice and Truth) that wheresoever it is publish'd with all its proper Testimonials around it, it carries with it even in our Day, a very sufficient Evidence to every studious and faithful Enquirer. For if it were possible for a humble and sincere Soul under all these Advantages, not to see sufficient Reason to believe the Gospel, this would be a heavy Impeachment of the Evidence and Honour of Christianity, and consequently of the Care of *Christ*, for the Propagation and Support of his Church; it would look as tho' he had not provided his own Doctrine with sufficient Proofs and Arguments, to enlighten and persuade an

honest Mind to embrace it; it would be an Imputation upon the general Goodness of God, as tho' he had appointed a Religion to continue thro' all Ages to the End of the World, and yet had not furnish'd it with Light and Demonstration sufficient to convey it thro' the several Successions of Time.

I think therefore it may be maintained, that the dreadful Curse which is so often repeated by the Historians of the Life of *Christ*, and which our Saviour pronounces, when he was just leaving the World, upon those who should not believe his Gospel where it is publish'd with proper Evidence, is not confined merely to the Days of Miracles, but that it is a Part of the great *Gospel-Commission* which he gave to his Apostles, and which stands good so long as *Christ* promised to be with his Ministers and Followers, *i. e. to the End of the World*, Mat. xxviii. 20. Mark xvi. 16. And the Guilt of rejecting it must always in the Nature of Things bear a Proportion to the Light and Evidence with which it is recommended, whether in the primitive or the modern Ages. For as all that rejected the Doctrine of *Christ* in the primitive Times, did not lie under equal Guilt, because they had not equal Evidence, so there may be great Variety in the Degrees of the Guilt of those who reject the Gospel in the present Age,
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according to their various Advantages of Understanding and Means of Knowledge. But I fear those who renounce and deride the highest Evidence of the Gospel in this present Day, have a dreadful Account to give at last, nor do I know how they will skreen themselves from the heavy and eternal Weight of that solemn Curse.

The great God is wise and righteous, and full of Mercy, and he would never have pronounced such a painful and terrible Sentence as *Damnation* upon Unbelievers in so many Parts of his Word, if he had not well known that no Man can utterly reject Christianity attended with its proper Evidence, but he must indulge some criminal and perverse Turn and Temper of Mind, he must be influenced by some very culpable Prejudices, and such Obstinacy as deserves Death and Vengeance.* *Christ* himself not only intimates this often, but plainly expresses it in that solemn Denunciation from God, *John* iii. 18, 19. *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of*

* *Damnation* is threatned to those who believe not the Gospel, *Mark* xvi. nor am I allowed to soften the Threatning which the Gospel has pronounced: It seems to me to be a very great Reproach which Men cast upon *Christ*, to suppose that he should set forth a Religion to be received on Pain of *Damnation*, and yet that a sincere Man may see no Reason to believe it. I think every Man should be cautious how he talks of *Sincerity* against plain Scripture, which he has Opportunity to know and consider.* Mr. J. B.

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God, and this is the Condemnation, i. e. this is the heinous Guilt that deserves Condemnation, that *Light is come into the World, and Men love Darkneſs rather than Light, be-
cause their Deeds are evil.* That God who ſearcheth the Hearts of Men, imputes it to a ſecret Love to Vice, that Men are unwilling to be convinced of a Religion that reproveſ and forbids the Practice of it. I would hope this is not always the Caſe, but 'tis very plain that 'tis often ſo.

However, 'tis a bold and dangerous thing for a Creature to venture to expoſe himſelf to the Curſe of God, by renouncing the Faith and Religion of Jeſus his beloved Son, which is ſupported by ſuch ſhining Evidence, and guarded with ſo ſolemn and formidable a Sanction.

But after all, if there can be found any ſuch Perſons that will ſtill make Pretences to a *ſincere Enquiry after Truth*, and ſolemnly declare they have been upright, honeſt, humble and diligent, according to the Deſcriptions of *Sincerity* before given, and yet that they cannot believe the *Chriſtian* Religion, becauſe they have not been able to find ſufficient Evidence or Conviction of the Truth of it, we muſt leave them to that God who is the only Searcher of Hearts, and who will make it appear that he is a righteous Judge, and not unmerciful to thoſe who have any reaſonable Pretences to Mercy.

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But let them see to it that their Cause is good, and that their own Hearts don't deceive them in their Pretences to *sincere Enquiry*. *The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* If the great Lord and Judge of all at last shall make it appear to their Consciences with dreadful Evidence, that they have failed in their Pretences, and been woefully insincere in their Searches after Truth, all their Hope is lost and cut off for ever, for they have refused the Gospel, and Promises of Grace, they have counted the *Blood* of the Son of God *an unholy Thing*, and renounced the only Atonement for Sin.

QUESTION VIII.

BUT why must only one Religion be the true? why may there not be many true Religions? May not the blessed God be well pleased with that great Variety of Worship and Honours which are paid him by his Creatures in this lower World, even as a Master of a Family or a Prince is well pleased with Variety of Services paid him by his Officers, Subjects and Servants in their different Stations in the Family or Kingdom: Thus while every one endeavours to serve and please God his Creator, will he not accept them, tho' they practise Religion in very different Forms, and worship him even with contrary Rites and Ceremonies?

remonies? Why may he not be best pleased with Praise and Homage offered by his intelligent Creatures in a vast Variety of Strains and Modes, since he has made the irrational Creation on Purpose to be honoured by their Varieties of Voice and Action.

Answ. I. Let us consider what are the greatest Part of these different Forms of Worship and Religion which Men practise, and we shall find very few of them are such as can lay any tolerable Claim to God's Favour.

In all the four Quarters of the World, except *Europe*, the Bulk of Mankind are *Heathens*. All the large Nations of *Africa*, (except the Northeast and the Northern Coasts) most of the Northern and Eastern Parts of *Asia*, so far as we know, together with the Natives of all *America*, worship Idols, and not the one true God. They adore either the Sun or Moon, or the Souls of their Heroes and Ancestors, or Devils, or some fabulous Deities, or strange Images of the Invention of their Priests, or the Appointment of their Kings: And even the Northern Shores of *Europe* where the *Laplanders* dwell, are filled with the same Idolatry. Now can you think it becoming the great and blessed God to accept that Worship, where he himself is not the Object of it? Will the jealous and dreadful
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God, *who will not give his Name to another, nor his Glory to graven Images*, will he be pleased with abominable Idolatries, and the Worship of false Gods? These Religions are contrary to the very Light of Nature; for a moderate Exercise of their Reason would shew them the one eternal God, *who made Heaven and Earth and all Things, he is not far from every one of them*, yet they will not seek and feel after him, but go on thoughtless in the Way of their Education, and persist in stupid and brutal Ignorance: Surely that God who hath made Idolaters smart terribly under the Rod of his Jealousy and Indignation in former Nations and Ages, *will be revealed in flaming Fire, and take Vengeance on them, who will not know him. He will pour out his Wrath on the Heathens that know him not, and the Families that call not upon his Name,* 2 Thess. i. 8. and Jer. x. 25.

I am well aware that those Persons who plead for these Idolaters, will excuse them by supposing they worship the *true God* under various Names, and in several Shapes or Forms, signifying his various Attributes or Powers, or the several Benefits we receive from him.

But I reply, that this is not true in Fact concerning the greatest Part of Mankind: For howbever some few of their wisest Men might have this Opinion, yet the Bulk of

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the *Heathen* World always did, and do to this Day worship the various Idols themselves as so many Gods, and disown the one true God. Ask the old *Greek* and *Roman* Writers, ask the Travellers of modern Ages, they will agree to tell you, that the People generally worship and believe this Variety of Gods.

Perhaps it will be said, that none of them could be so sottish as to adore the very Images of Gold or Silver, Wood or Stone, as their Gods, but they adored some divine Power, which they supposed to inhabit those Images after their fancied Consecration of them.

But the Prophet *Isaiah* will answer, that the *Smith* and the *Carpenter* exert their Labour and Skill, they make the Figure of a Man out of a Mass of Metal, or the Trunk of a Tree, they fall down to it and worship it, they pray to it and say, Deliver me for thou art my God. They have not known nor understood better, so brutish are they and ignorant, *Esa. xli. 44.*

I add yet further, that others of them who were not so grossly stupid, as to worship the very Metal, the Wood or Stone, yet they paid Adoration to *Bacchus* and *Mars*, to *Juno* and *Venus*, to fabulous Deities or mere Names, or to Devils, whom they supposed to dwell in these Images; but the only true God was far from their Thoughts: And is this a Religion worthy of the Majesty

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jesty of Heaven, or fit for him to accept at the Hands of Creatures whom he has endued with Reason?

And as for those few among them who have acknowledged the one true God, even their wise Men and Philosophers, they comply'd with national Idolatries, they *held the Truth in Unrighteousness*, that is, they unrighteously restrained the Truth which was in their Consciences, or concealed it amidst all their Unrighteousness of Practice. They acted contrary to the Light and Dictates of their own Consciences, and yielded themselves Servants to the vile and idolatrous Customs of their Country, in many of their ridiculous and impious Rites and Ceremonies: They *changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into the Images of Birds, Beasts and Fishes*, and worship'd Creatures even while they knew the Creator. And can these Men have any Claim to the Favour of God, who would not dare to bear a Testimony to his Name and Glory, among Idolaters? These Men who when *they knew God they glorified him not as God, but turned his Glory into a Lye?* Rom. i. 21, 23.

As for the Nations who own the one true God, which are chiefly the *Jews* and the *Mahometans*, the various Ceremonies with which they now worship him, cannot be supposed to be agreeable to his Majesty, or to render the Worshipers the Objects of

his Delight ; let us consider them distinctly.

The Nation of the *Jews* has had the Gospel of *Christ* preach'd to them, but they have put the *Mercy of God* far from them, and abandon'd his Salvation, *Acts* xiii. 46. Their Forms of Worship, tho' they were once appointed by God himself, yet their Term and Season is expired, and they are now divinely abolished. Besides, they practise to this Day what their Fathers were guilty of in the Days of *Christ*, (*viz.*) They make void the Commandments of God, by the Multitude of their own Traditions, and superstitious Rites which they have invented. God has directly cast them off and rejected them, because they rejected his Son *Jesus*; they were once his beloved People, but now are not his People nor beloved, for they persist in their Hatred of the beloved Son of God, and most of them have conceived the utmost Aversion to the Name of *Jesus*.

The *Mahometans* own the true God, and practise many Duties of Morality : But how ridiculous and irrational is a great Part of their Religion or Worship ? What a silly Book is the *Alcoran*, which is their Bible ? God requires a reasonable Service, *Rom.* xii. 1. But how many absurd Fooleries are mingled with their Articles of Faith and Practice ? Where shall we find any national Religion besides the *Christian*, that hath the

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the Countenance and Support of Reason? With what wild and impudent Fables do the Writings of *Mahomet*, and the Tales of his Followers furnish and fill the Minds of the *Turks* and *Persians* in *Europe* and *Asia*, and the *Moors* and *Barbarians* in *Africa*? And what numberless Tenets and Rites are found in their Religion, which have no Manner of Evidence or Defence from the Light of Nature or common Reason?

After all, if there are any Persons found among all these Nations that have been or shall be accepted of God, 'tis not their various Ceremonies or superstitious Fopperies that are the Objects of his Delight. These are rather so many Errors and Faults in their Religion, and stand in Need of Forgiveness. The only just Ground of Hope that any of them can have of divine Acceptance, arises not from their own Ceremonies, but from their Observance of some Precepts of the Light of Nature, some broken Traditions of divine Revelation, some Fragments of the Gospel, and pardoning Grace delivered down from *Noah*, *Abraham*, or *Moses*, or derived from their Acquaintance with the revealed Religion of the *Jews* or *Christians*, as I shall shew under the next Question.

Ans. II. If God had a Mind to accept the various Religions which Men have invented, and would delight himself in their
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divers fantastick Forms of Worship, why did he ever reveal to Men any peculiar Religion at all? Why did he appoint Sacrifices to *Adam*? Why further Discoveries to *Noah*? Why Circumcision to *Abraham*? Why a Variety of Rites to the *Jews* under *Moses*? And why did he manifest himself in the last Place by *Jesus Christ* his Son, and appoint a Religion that surpasses them all to be preach'd to all Nations? I take these several Revelations now for granted, since it would be too long to prove them here.

Now since he hath revealed peculiar Ways of pleasing and honouring him, and obtaining his Favour, and that to various Ages and Nations, 'tis evident that he did not design to give a Loose to the wild Fancies of Mankind, to contrive a Religion each for himself, and resolve to be pleased with any Superstitions which they should invent.

If the Servants of a Family, or the Subjects or Officers of a Kingdom, had special Forms of Service and Duty assigned them, in order to please their Superior, surely no Prince nor Master could be pleased with their humorous and fantastick Pretences to please or gratify him in another Way, under the Neglect of his own Appointments.

However, this is sufficient for us, that since we in *Great Britain* have a divine Revelation so well attested, we are not left to

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our own Fancy, to invent a Worship for our selves: Nor will the great God ever be pleased with those who reject his divine Contrivances and Counsels in the Gospel, and pretend to find new Ways of their own to obtain his Favour. The very Pretence is too assuming and presumptuous for a Creature, ever to hope for Acceptance by it in the Sight of God his Creator.

Q U E S T I O N IX.

BUT have not *Heathens* and *Infidels* been saved as well as *Jews* and *Christians*? Did not *Job* and his four Friends in *Arabia*, and *Melchisedec* King of *Salem*, and *Jethro* the Priest of *Midian*, and *Cornelius* a Heathen Soldier, a Centurion in *Cesarea*, all find Acceptance with God, tho' they were *Gentiles* or *Heathens*, and worshipped him in a different Way from *Abraham* and *Moses*, and the Nation of the *Jews*? Did not God sufficiently shew his Approbation of them and their Religion, tho' some of them lived near enough to the Families of *Abraham* and *Israel*, and might have acquainted themselves with their instituted Ways of Worship? And doth not *Peter's* Speech to *Cornelius* confirm this? Read the Story, *Acts* x. 1, 2, 3, 31, 34, 35. There was a certain Man in *Cesarea*, called *Cornelius*, a Centurion of the Band called the *Italian Band*, a devout Man, and one that feared God
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with all his House, which gave much Alms to the People, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a Vision evidently about the ninth Hour of the Day, an Angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius, thy Prayer is heard, and thine Alms are had in Remembrance in the Sight of God. Then Peter being sent for opened his Mouth, and said, of a Truth I perceive that God is no Respector of Persons: But in every Nation, he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness is accepted with him. Why then may not a Philosopher in China, a Heathen in America, or a Deist in Britain, if he follows the Dictates of the Light of Nature, worshipping the true God, and practising the common Duties of Morality, find Acceptance with God?

Ans. The last Part of this Question has (I think) a sufficient Answer given to it under the former Questions, when I proved that the mere Light of Nature is not sufficient to secure Salvation to sinful and fallen Man. What further Force is added to this Objection by the Instances of Job, Jethro, Melchisedec, Cornelius, &c. I shall endeavour to answer in the following Propositions, and herein declare my Sentiments with Freedom, How far any of the Heathens may hope for Salvation, and how little Hope there is for a modern Deist enjoying the full Light of Christianity.

Prop.

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Prop. I. Since Mankind have broken the Laws of their Maker, and are become sinful Creatures, and guilty before God, they have cut themselves off from all Hope of obtaining his Favour and final Happiness by the Law of Innocency. *There is none righteous, no not one: They are all fallen short of Glory and Immortality: Their own Consciences upon a just Enquiry must lay them under Condemnation, Every Mouth is stopped, and all the World is become guilty before God.*

Prop. II. The Light of Nature, which inform'd innocent Man, that he must obey God in all Things, may reach so far as to inform sinful Man, that he must repent of his Transgressions, that he must endeavour after new Obedience with a persevering Constancy; and it may direct him to apply himself to seek Forgiveness and Acceptance with God, by humble and fervent Prayer: But this Light of Nature cannot teach him to make Atonement for Sin, nor could ever assure any Man that his Repentance shall be accepted so far as to obtain Forgiveness.*

The utmost Stretch of the Light of Nature is well described in the Practice and Hope of the *Ninevites*, in the Book of *Jo-*

* See the *Insufficiency of natural Religion*, proved at large in Mr. *Tho. Haliburton's* excellent Treatise on the Subject, in 4to, and in Mr. *Nath. Taylor's Preservative against Deism*, 1st and 2d Part, 8vo.

nah, ch. iii. v. 8, 9. Let Man neither eat nor drink, but be covered with Sackcloth, i. e. Let him abstain from his usual Refreshments and Pleasures, and cry mightily unto God: Yea, let them turn every one from his evil Way: Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger, that we perish not? The Hope of the Light of Nature, even in a repenting Sinner, can reach no farther than a Who can tell, whether God will accept it?

*Prop. III. Since the Light of Nature and Reason could not inform a guilty Creature, what is necessary and sufficient to atone for Sin, or appease the just Anger and Resentment of God against it, nor assure him that an offended God would ever be reconciled to him notwithstanding his Repentance, it pleased God in his infinite Mercy to make a Revelation or Discovery of pardoning Grace to our first Parents, in and by some glorious Mediator or Saviour, and to tell them that this Saviour should be born of the Woman, that he should destroy the Works of the Devil, and relieve Mankind from the Curse and Misery in which the Temptation of Satan, and their own Guilt had involved them. This is the Sense of the first Promise, as it has been abundantly explained and proved by many Writers, * wherein*

* See Dr. William Harris's Sermons on the *Messiah*, and his Explication of this Text, *Gen. iii. 15*: and Dr. Sherlock (now

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wherein God foretold, that *the Seed of the Woman should bruise the Head of the Serpent,* and that the *Serpent should bruise his Heel.*

Upon this Foot Sacrifices of Beasts were instituted to preserve these two Notions in the Memory of Man, (*viz.*) that Sin deserved Death, and that God would provide a sufficient Sacrifice in his own Time to expiate Sin.

'Tis very probable, that God did not leave our first Parents without some clearer Explication of this first Promise, some plain-er Notices of his intended Grace, and of this future Saviour. 'Tis likely that he acquainted them with the Reason and Nature, and Design of bloody Sacrifices, and taught them more particularly in what Manner to address him for Mercy, and how to please him in other necessary Parts of Worship and Duty: For we cannot suppose, that God left Mankind for almost 2000 Years to live upon the mere Words of *Gen. iii. 15.* nor can we reasonably believe, that *Moses* in so very short an Abstract of the Affairs of Mankind before the Flood, relates all the Transactions that past between God and Man, nor all the Revelations that God made to them of his Grace, and the Way of Salvation by a Mediator.

(now Bishop of *Bangor*) in his Discourses of the *Use of Prophecy.* Disc. 3d.

Prop. IV. All the Persons of the successive Generations, which arose between *Adam* and *Noah*, might have learned the necessary Lessons of Duty and Grace from *Adam* and *Eve*, and from those of their Posterity, who conversed with them; and this is very easy to be supposed, by Reason of the Length of Life, with which Mankind were favoured in that early Age of the World.

Prop. V. As *Noah* had received by Tradition from *Adam* these divine Lessons, so doubtless he had them as it were confirm'd and renew'd to him by his frequent Converses with God; wherein he received some further Assurances of divine Mercy, and further Instructions in particular Duties and Privileges, (*viz.*) He was indulged to eat Flesh, and to kill the Beasts of the Earth for his Food: He had undoubted Discoveries of what Creatures were fit for Food and Sacrifice, by the clean Beasts coming by Sevens, and the unclean Beasts by Pairs to be saved from the Flood, if he did not know this before. Yet further, he received a Command to eat no Blood, and an Order that the Murderer of Man should be put to Death: And besides all this, he had God's Covenant sealed to him and his Posterity by the Rain-bow.

Prop. VI. *Noah* being the second great Patriarch or Father of all Mankind, 'tis evident

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evident that the Covenant of Grace or God's Dispensation of Mercy to sinful Man, was revealed to all Mankind the second Time in and by him: For *Noah* was the Progenitor of all Men after the Flood; and as he was a *Preacher of Righteousness*, doubtless he diffused this useful and important Knowledge to his Sons, and committed it to their Care to be convey'd to his Posterity. *Note*, I shall call this the *Patriarchal Religion*, to distinguish it from the *Abrahamic*, the *Jewish* and *Christian*.

Prop. VII. Since the Days of *Noah* there has been no new or further Revelation of the Mercy of God, and the Duty of Men made universally to all Mankind.

The Revelation of further Duties which was made to *Abraham*, belong'd only to his Posterity, and did not oblige the rest of the Nations to Circumcision, &c.

The further Requirements of various Duties and Ceremonies, that were given to the *Israelites* by *Moses*, obliged only that one Nation to the Observance of them: Tho' it must be acknowledged the other Nations, who had any Communication with the Family of *Abraham* and the Nation of the *Jews*, had rich Advantages for the Knowledge, Preservation, and Practice of the Religion of *Noah*, by their Communication with the Posterity of *Abraham* and *Israel*.

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The Gospel of *Christ* indeed which was revealed near 1700 Years ago, requires the Faith and Obedience of all to whom it is made known with clear Evidence, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*; but I question whether it has been yet thus publish'd to more than one Half of Mankind. So that this Truth still abides firm, that the Religion of *Noah* was the last Revelation made to the whole World.

Prop. VIII. From these Considerations it will follow, that whosoever among Men, between the Days of *Adam* and *Noah*, believed and practised the Religion of *Adam*, if they had no further Revelation given them, were accepted of God: And whosoever between the Days of *Noah* and *this Day*, have practised the Religion of *Noah*, if they have had no further Revelation brought to them, have a plain and evident Interest in the Favour of God, and the Blessings of Salvation, according to the Promises made to *Adam* and *Noah*, and the Religion which was severally prescribed to them.

Now here come in the Hopes of Grace and Salvation for *Job* and his four Friends in *Arabia*, for *Melchisedec* in the Land of *Canaan*, for *Jethro* a Priest or Prince in *Midian*, for *Cornelius* a Roman Soldier in *Cesarea*, and perhaps for several Persons of other Nations who have been accepted of God, tho' they were not of the Seed of *Abraham*, of
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the Nation of *Israel*, nor ever heard of the Gospel of *Christ*: The Religion prescribed to *Noah*, as the second Father of all Mankind, is certainly sufficient for their Pardon and Acceptance with God, supposing it to be the only Religion which was ever prescribed to them.

Here I ask Leave to tarry a little, and answer two or three Objections, before I proceed to the ninth *Proposition*.

Obj. I. Does not St. *Peter* tell the Elders of *Israel*, when he had preached *Christ* to them, *Acts* iv. 12. That *there is not Salvation in any other, for there is none other Name under Heaven given amongst Men, whereby we must be saved?* And thence some Persons may infer, that the actual Knowledge of the Name of *Christ*, and Faith in him since his Religion was instituted, are absolutely necessary for the Salvation of all Men.

To this I answer, first, That the Apostle in this Place does not assert the actual Knowledge of *Christ* to be necessary to all Men, but only that there is but one Saviour provided for all Men under Heaven, and that is *Jesus Christ*. Now as the Patriarchs and the ancient *Jews*, were saved by *Jesus of Nazareth*, and by virtue of his Atonement, without knowing his Name, and before he came into the World, so might those *Gentiles*, if they maintained the Substance of the patriarchal Religion, be
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saved by the Atonement of *Christ*, without the actual Knowledge of his Name.

But I answer in the second Place, that if the *Gentiles* might be saved by observing the patriarchal Religion before the coming of *Christ*, they might also be saved by the same Religion, where the Name of *Christ* was never preached: For the coming or not coming of *Christ*, can make no Difference in the Religion of those Nations which never heard of it.

Obj. II. But we do not read that *Melchisedec* or *Cornelius* offered Sacrifices as *Noah* did, or kept close in all the Parts of Faith and Practice to the Religion of *Noah*.

Ans. I. We read that *Job* and *Jethra* offered Sacrifices, *Job* i. 5. *Exod.* xviii. 12. And 'tis very probable that *Melchisedec* did so too; for tho' he was a Priest of Intercession, and pray'd for *Abraham* and blessed him, yet this does not at all forbid our Belief of his receiving and preserving the Institution of Sacrifices from his Ancestor *Noah*: Whether *Cornelius* offered Sacrifices or no, the Scripture is silent.

And as for the other Parts of *Noah's* Faith and Practice, as they were derived partly from Reason and partly from Revelation, tho' they were lost among several Nations in a few Ages, yet it is very probable that they were convey'd down thro' several Ages in some other Nations, and especially

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especially among those who had any Commerce with the *Jews*: For the chief Thing which the *Jews* themselves required of their *Profelytes of the Gate*, in order to their Share of Happiness in the World to come, was their Conformity to the Precepts of *Noah*. Those who practised them were called the *devout or religious Persons*, and the *Men that feared God* in *Acts* xiii. 16, 43. and *Acts* xvii. 4, 17. among whom the Apostles obtained the largest Harvest of *Gentile* Converts in their first preaching the Gospel. And probably these are the same Precepts in the main which were enjoyn'd by the Apostles in the xvth of *Acts* to the converted *Gentiles*, excepting only that Sacrifices were omitted, since the great Sacrifice of *Christ* was offered.

Thus 'tis evident that *Noah's* Religion was in the main kept alive in some of the *Gentile* Nations, especially by such Persons among them as had most Conversation with the *Jews* before their Dispersions; and after their great Dispersions by many Captivities, there were several other Persons among the *Gentiles*, who by this Means got Acquaintance with the true God, and the Religion of the *Profelytes of the Gate*, which was the Religion of *Noah*.

The Expression of St. *Peter* concerning *Cornelius*, *Acts* x. 34. is very easily explained by this View of Things. Of a Truth

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I perceive God is no Respector of Persons, i. e. I who was once involv'd in the common Prejudices of my Country-Men, and thought the Jews only were to be favour'd with the Blessings of the Messiah's Kingdom, I am now convinced that God does not respect Men of one Nation more than another, but in every Nation, whether Jew or Gentile, he that fears God and works Righteousness, i. e. he who practises the Duties of that Religion which is prescribed to him, is accepted of God. St. Peter does not say, a Man may be accepted in every Religion, but only in every Nation; for Cornelius was probably a Believer and Practiser of the patriarchal Religion, and was in a saved State and reconciled to God, tho' he did not know the peculiar Means which procured that Reconciliation.

You will say then, why was St. Peter sent to speak Words to him whereby he should be saved? The plain Meaning is, that Peter was sent to teach him those particular Transactions of divine Grace, and the Doctrine of the Death and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whereby God saves Sinners; that by this Means he might have clearer Discoveries of his own Acceptance, and be assisted in the Ways of Holiness with incomparably more Advantage and Comfort than ever he could have attained by following
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his imperfect Notices of the patriarchal Religion, and the Precepts of *Noah*.

As for the *Sacrifices* and *Abstinence from Blood, and Things strangled*, which were Parts of *Noah's* Religion, 'tis not certain how far *Cornelius* knew or comply'd with them; I therefore proceed to a second Answer to the Objection.

Ans. II. If thro' Length of Time, and the wide Dispersion of some Nations, and the Negligence of their Fathers, many of them lost some Parts of the Religion of their Ancestor *Noah*, yet several of them might retain the most substantial and necessary Articles of it. If they practis'd sincere Love to God, and Trust in his Mercy, thro' some expected but unknown Methods of Reconciliation, together with sincere Repentance for their Sins, and Diligence in their Endeavours after all Holiness, we have Reason to hope that a gracious and condescending God would accept of their hearty Desires and Endeavours to please him, while they believed and practis'd according to the utmost Degrees of the Discovery of Grace and Duty that ever were convey'd down to them.

It is God alone who is their Ruler and Judge: He knows how much Doctrine and Duty is necessary for the Salvation of every Man, under the particular Dispensations and Advantages he enjoys: His Mercy will

make favourable Allowances for what Parts of the patriarchal Religion they never learn'd, because their Fathers had lost or neglected, or forgot them: And he knows how far to make Allowances of Forgiveness also, for what tolerable Follies and lesser Superstitions they or their Fathers have added, if it has risen from an inward sincere and mistaken Desire to please him. But God alone is a sufficient Judge in this Case, and we must leave them to his Judgment.

Obj. III. But in the New Testament the Scripture does not seem to speak of the *Heathens* as having any Knowledge of divine Revelation, or as practising the Religion revealed to *Adam*, or *Noah*, or *Abraham*, but as left to the Light of Nature, to the Law written in their Hearts, and to their own Consciences accusing or excusing them, Rom. ii. 15.

Ans. w. It is so indeed with the Bulk of the *Heathen* World, for most of them seem'd by that Time when the New Testament was written, to have forgotten the Religion of *Noah*: But then consider what a wretched State or Condition it is in which the Scripture represents the Bulk of the *Gentile* Nations, because by their own and their Forefathers Negligence they had lost all the Revelations of Grace: They are filled with all Unrighteousness, Fornication, Wickedness,
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full of Envy, Murder, Malice, Haters of God, without natural Affection, Covenant Breakers, implacable, unmerciful, given up to work Uncleanneſs with Greedineſs, Strangers to all the Covenants of Promise, without Hope, and without God in the World.

And if amongſt this wretched Herd of Sinners, there ſhould happen to be here and there one in a thouſand that humbly followed every glimmering Track of divine Light in his own Conſcience, and earneſtly intreated the Favour of God, I ſhall account for ſuch a Man's Hopes in the tenth Propoſition.

Prop. IX. As for thoſe Families or Nations to whom God has made any new and further Revelations of his Mind and Will, beyond the Religion of *Noah*, and enjoyn'd other Duties upon them, they can have no Hope of Acceptance with God, unleſs they comply with theſe new Revelations, and perform the Duties enjoyn'd. Let us conſider them particularly.

If the Seed of *Abraham*, who received an evident and authentick Account of *Abraham's* Religion, utterly reſuſe Circumciſion, or renounced their Faith in the Seed of *Abraham* as a Saviour, they muſt account for it to God their Judge, nor do I ſee how they can claim this Favour.

If the *Jews* before the coming of their *Meffiah*, renounced the Law of *Mofes*, and rebelled

rebelled against the Discoveries of Grace and Duty that were made to their Nation, I see but little Grounds for their Hope.

If the *Jews* or *Gentiles* who have ever heard the preaching of the Gospel of *Christ* in its clear Light and Evidence, renounce this Gospel and this Saviour, and rebel against this Grace, I cannot find any Claim that they can have to the Forgiveness of Sins, or to their Acceptance with God and eternal Life.

Prop. X. Where there is an intire and invincible Ignorance of all God's appointed Methods of Grace, both *Patriarchal*, *Jewish* and *Christian*, if there should be any Person humbly asking Forgiveness of God, and diligent in following every Dictate of his own Conscience, and longing after some further Discoveries of divine Grace and his own Duty, I will not deny but that God may condescend to save him, thro' the extensive Merits of the Mediator, by sovereign and unpromised Mercy; tho' he cannot claim the Pardon of his Sins or Acceptance with God, because he has no Revelation of Grace made to him.

Or if God see it necessary to acquaint him with any explicit Methods of his Grace, in order to his Salvation, I am persuaded wheresoever he finds such a sincere Soul, he will inwardly illuminate him by his own Spirit of Revelation, or will send an Angel
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or an Apostle to him, as he did to *Cornelius* to speak Words to him whereby he shall be saved.

And I have given this as one Reason of it before, (*viz.*) because if there can be found any such humble sincere Seeker after God, it is God himself has wrought this religious Temper in the Heart, and he will not forsake the Work of his own Hands.

Prop. XI. But the modern *Deists*, who are obstinate in their Infidelity, and the Apostates in our Age and Nation, who have renounced their Faith, can take no Manner of Sanctuary under the Examples of these Men, *Job*, *Jethro*, *Melchisedec*, and *Cornelius*; nor can they borrow a Grain of Ease to their Consciences, nor one Glimpse of Hope from all the Concessions I have made in favour of the *Heathen* Nations: For they have much clearer Light manifested to them, than any of the Persons I have been speaking of, either in ancient or modern Times, and some of them at least seem to wink against the Sun-beams, content to dwell in Darkness, and fond of *Heathenism*.

I would ask any of our *English* Infidels this plain Question, Whether *Cornelius* himself could have claimed or expected Acceptance with God and Salvation, if he had refused to believe and obey the Doctrines and Duties of the new Religion, which God revealed to him by the Means of an Angel and an Apostle? And if they themselves
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abuse so glorious a Light as shines among them in *Great Britain*, not only *Job* and *Melchisedec* and *Cornelius*, but even the poor *Muscovites* and *Laplanders*, and all the blindest Part of the *Heathen World*, will rise up against them in the great Day; even *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, the *Negroes* and *Hottentots* of *Africa*, and the wild *American Savages*, will stand in Judgment against them and condemn them. Those who have been, as it were exalted to *Heaven*, as *Capernaum* and *Bethsaida* were, in the Discoveries of the Gospel, and yet obstinately reject it, what can they expect but the Fate and Sentence of *Capernaum* and *Bethsaida*, that is, to be thrust down to *Hell*, without Pity or Hope of Pardon?

Methinks I feel a Pain at my Heart, when I'm forced to use such Language. But knowing the Threatnings and Terrors of the Lord, we endeavour to persuade Men, that they would not oblige him to the terrible Execution of them. O may divine Light and preventing Grace over-power their chosen Darkness, and lead them captive to the Obedience of Faith; and thereby to everlasting Glory!

QUESTION X.

SUPPOSE a Man has taken great and sincere Pains in searching into the Evidences of the Christian Religion, suppose

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pose him heartily desirous to receive Conviction of the Truth, attentive to the Force of every Argument, and engaged in daily Supplications to God, to lead him into the right Way of Salvation; and yet after all he solemnly declares, that the Evidences at present arise no higher in his Judgment, than to a mere Probability: Suppose he can get no further than just to say, *I do rather think the Gospel true than false*: Is such a one bound to practise Christianity?

Ans. Yes, by all Means: And that for these three Reasons.

1. In such Sort of Questions, where the Truth and Evidence depend much upon Matters of Fact, which were done in past Ages, and distant Nations, such as ancient Miracles and Prophecies, &c. We cannot arise to such a *natural or mathematical Certainty*, as we may in Questions about Things present, which are the Objects of our Senses, or about Propositions in Geometry, where our Reason sees the strongest Proof and undeniable Demonstration. In such Questions therefore as the ancient Prophecies and Miracles, which support the Truth of the *Jewish* or the *Christian* Religion, we can arrive only at a *moral Certainty*, by the Use of our reasoning Powers on these Evidences: This moral Certainty is built on such a Degree of Evidence, that it is hardly possible in the Nature of Things, that the

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contested Proposition should not be true. 'Tis with this *moral Certainty* the generality of Men in *England* believe *there is a Pope at Rome*, that *there is a King of Spain*, or that *they make fine Silks in China*, or that *King George reigns in Great Britain*. Now if our Evidence rises but to a Probability, it ought certainly to influence our Practice, since a *moral Certainty* (which is all that I here plead for) is but the highest Degree of this Kind: We don't expect Demonstrations in such a Case, tho' the Assent sometimes is so just and so strong that in many Cases it may be well call'd *Assurance*. We may boldly and truly say, We are sure that there is such a Country as *China*, such a City as *Rome*; we are sure there was such a Man as King *Henry the Eight of England*, and *Alexander of Greece*; we are sure there was such a Person as *Jesus Christ in Judea*, that he wrought Miracles to prove his divine Mission, and that he taught a Doctrine which came from God.

2. In a great Part of the Actions which we perform in human Life we go upon much lesser Probability, and think we have sufficient Ground to act without a full Assurance: We go to visit our Friends at an appointed Hour, because 'tis probable we shall meet them at Home: We travel from Place to Place, because 'tis probable we may find the Persons we seek, and do the Business

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ness we design: We send to Market for Food, because 'tis probable that Flesh and Herbs are there waiting to be sold: We make Bargains about Goods which we never saw, because 'tis probable these Goods are worth our Money, and will be convey'd to us: We run great Risks by Sea and Land, we venture our Substance, and even Life itself across the Ocean and thro' a thousand Dangers upon mere Probabilities: If therefore it be but a probable Thing that the Christian Religion be true, it is the undoubted Duty and Interest of every wise Man to endeavour to secure the Salvation which the Christian Religion proposes by the Practice of all its appointments: For if we neglect it, even according to our own Opinion 'tis probable we shall be for ever miserable; and if we practise it, 'tis probable we shall be saved: And the very Probability of securing infinite Happiness and of escaping infinite Distress is sufficient to set a wise Man heartily to work.

3. There is no doubt but in the primitive Times there were many, both *Jews* and *Heathens*, who were not arrived at a compleat Certainty and full Assurance of the Truth of the Christian Religion at first when they profess'd it; but the Arguments on the Side of the Gospel seem'd in their Judgment to be stronger than those against it, and therefore they embraced the Religion

of Christ: This is manifest from several of the Writings of the Apostles, wherein they endeavour to establish young and doubtful Converts in a firmer Belief of the Gospel, and to guard them against wavering. Many of these came afterwards to be firm and establish'd Christians, Confessors, and Martyrs for the Truth, and sealed it with their Blood.

The Light of Evidence which shines round the Gospel, tho' it be great and glorious in itself, yet to a dim Eye, or to a Man but half awakened, may appear like the dusky Twilight, or the faint and early Dawn of the Morning, but just discovering the Path to Happiness. Yet let the honest Traveller to Immortality pursue his Way by this feeble Light; 'Tis the best Guide he has; Let him not lie still or loiter because he does not discern his Path with an indubitable Assurance, nor see his Way surrounded with Meridian Splendors.

'Tis sufficiently manifest even to these doubting Souls, that all other Religions which pretend to Revelation fall vastly short of the Excellencies of Christianity; and that the Gospel is far preferable to all of them, both as to its own inward Worth, and its outward Evidences. If natural Religion appear never so excellent in their Eyes this very Religion of Nature is all included in the Religion of Christ. And if they have

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have but a Glimpse of Evidence for the Gospel, Reason itself would require the Practice of it; since 'tis an additional Ground for their Hope of Divine Favour, agreeable to Reason and superadded to the Light of Nature. And if after all, their Belief of the Gospel should prove a Mistake, and the Religion of Nature be the only Truth, yet they can never imagine the God of Nature will condemn them for adding Faith in *Jesus Christ* to the Religion of Nature since it had probable Evidences to support it.

Let Persons therefore who are in these Circumstances together with their Practice of natural Religion trust in *Christ* and obey the Gospel. Let them proceed in their honest Search into the Evidences of Christianity: Let them love and value this Religion as far as they see it to be true: Let them pray earnestly for increasing Light and Conviction of the Truth, and not nourish their Doubts and multiply their Scruples by a wanton Curiosity or a cavilling Spirit. Let them *do the Will of Christ* as far as they know it, that according to his Promise *they may know more assuredly that this Doctrine is of God*. I can hardly suppose that such an humble, sincere Supplicant, and zealous Inquirer into the Truth of God, shall be left to continue Year after Year and to live and die in so fluctuating and doubtful a State of Mind,

If I had lived in this Frame of Soul and should be suddenly seiz'd with mortal Sickness, I would not only trust in the infinite Mercies of God, as I was passing into the unseen World, but I would keep fast the little Hold that I had of *Jesus* the Saviour. A merciful God who has no where forbid Sinners the Use of a Mediator would never abandon and condemn me for my Sense of my own Unworthiness to appear in his holy Presence, and for making use of the Mediation of such a Person who has the best Characters and Pretences to the Honour of that blessed Office.

But on the other Hand, if God has indeed appointed one only Mediator between himself and his sinful Creature *Man*, and if he has given me some feeble Knowledge of his Name and Office, and yet I refuse to accept of his Interest, because I have not full Assurance of it, and will venture into the immediate Presence of God without him, I should have just Reason to fear a terrible Repulse and an everlasting Exclusion from all the Blessings of his Love.

S E C T. IV.

General Exhortations to Christians derived from the foregoing Discourse.

ALL our Reasoning and Argument should tend to Practice. If we are Chri-

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Christians, and profess the Faith of *Jesus*, we must cheerfully receive Exhortations as well as Doctrine.

Exhort. 1. Is it of such infinite Importance to know which is the true Religion whereby we may please God and obtain eternal Happiness, *then, Christians, let our Hearts be filled with Gratitude and our Lips with Praise, that God has brought us up in the Knowledge of the Truth.* We are here in a State of Probation for Eternity: The Race is set, the Goal is fixt, the Prize appointed, and the various Rules are divinely prescribed, by which we must conduct ourselves in this important Race. Happy are those Mortals to whom God has made known the Nature of this Contest, the appointed Laws of it, and the glorious Prize. We can never sufficiently adore and bless the Name of our God, who has brought us into Being in such a Nation and in such an Age, wherein the Gospel of *Christ* is publish'd, that Gospel which contains all these momentous Discoveries.

What is it but rich and peculiar Grace that has appointed our Birth in *Great Britain* where the Name of *Christ* and his Gospel are known, while Millions of our Fellow-Creatures, made of the same Flesh and Blood, are travelling onwards to Eternity with few or none of these Advantages? O why was not I born among the wild and
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brutal Nations of *Africa*, where they know neither themselves nor their Creator? Where they are not taught nor have ever learnt their own Apostacy from God, and their Necessity of a Saviour? Why was not my Soul united to a human Body in the midst of the *American* Wilderness? Why am not I one of those fierce and ignorant Savages who know nothing of the Dignity of human Nature, nor have any Acquaintance with the true God their Creator and their Judge? And yet they are hastening onward, as fast as Days and Hours can convey them into an invisible and eternal State, utterly ignorant of that Heaven or that Hell which awaits all that depart hence: Who is it that has made me to differ? what is it but divine Sovereignty and rich Mercy, that has appointed my Station in a Land of *Christian* Knowledge? Is it not all owing to the free and unmerited Love of the great God, that he has made such an amazing Distinction between me and others? They are making Haste into Eternity as well as I; but their Way before them is all Darkness, for they have lost the ancient divine Light given to their Ancestors of old: And when they pass from this World into another, they must venture in the dark, and without any clear and solid Hope; for this is the Character of the Bulk of the *Heathen* World, that *they are without God, without*
Island *Christ,*

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Christ, and without Hope, both in this World and in that which is to come. What can I do but stand still and adore that rich Mercy that has conferred upon me so vast and so distinguishing a Privilege that reaches into the eternal World?

Come bless the Lord with me, all ye happy Souls, and highly favoured of God, who have been led into the Knowledge of the Gospel from your younger Years, and educated in the *Christian Faith*. Happy Youths who are not only born in such a Land of Light as *Great Britain*, but have enjoy'd the Blessing of religious Parents, who have taken Care to instruct you in the great Things of your Salvation. You have had your tender Minds imprest with *Christianity* betimes, and stamp'd with the divine Religion of *Jesus*. Like young *Timothy* from your very *Childhood*, you have known *the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise to Salvation*. Favourite Creatures! who have been nurs'd up in the Knowledge of your Creator from your very Cradles, and who have imbibed the *Words of Truth*, and the *Doctrine according to Godliness*. Happy Souls indeed who have been preserved by divine Providence and Grace, from sucking in those Prejudices against the Gospel of *Christ*, which have been the Poison and the Destruction of Multitudes in our Age! O bless the Lord with a joyful Heart,

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and awake all the Powers of Nature within you to bless this God of Grace, who has cast your Lot in a pleasant Situation, in a Land of Knowledge, in a Family of divine Light and Mercy. He has taught you sometimes his Law and his Gospel, his Justice and his Grace, he has let you see your Guilt and Misery, and your effectual Relief. *As for many other Families and other Nations, they have not known them, praise ye the Lord.*

Exhort. II. Since you have been divinely favoured with the Knowledge of the right Way to Heaven, *walk in it with all holy Diligence and Care.* Since the Rules of this sacred Contest for the Prize of Glory have been revealed to you, and set before you, awaken all your Powers into Activity, and strive that ye may *obtain the Crown.* 'Tis not enough that you know the right Path which leads to Heaven, if you are not engaged heartily in the *Christian Race.* A mere Knowledge of the Laws of it will never bring you to the Goal, nor intitle you to the heavenly Prize. He that would be crown'd must fight, must run, must strive, and exert all the Powers of Nature, according to the Methods prescribed by divine Grace, that he may be found an Overcomer.

Lift your selves therefore under the Banner of *Jesus*, the Captain of your Salvation, by a most solemn Profession of his
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Name and Devotion of your selves to him. Mortifie all your irregular Appetites; subdue your dear and darling Sins; resist every Temptation to Iniquity; keep under your Bodies, and every bodily Inclination that opposes the Purity and Perfection of the Spirit. Let no Pride or Envy, no Malice or Revenge, no Sensuality or Intemperance, no cruel or covetous or selfish Principles reign in you. *Abstain from fleshly Lusts that war against the Soul, 1 Pet. ii. 11. Every Man that strives for the Mastery, must be temperate in all Things:* And if the ancient Grecians practised this self-denial to obtain a corruptible and withering Crown, much more should Christians in their Pursuit of one that is incorruptible, and which never fades away, 1 Cor. ix. 25. Run with such Vigour in this holy Race, as tho' there could but one of you obtain the Prize, *forgetting the Things that are behind, stretch forward still with the Prize in your Eye, till you lay hold of it.* Let no Hardships discourage you, no Enemies or Dangers sink your Spirits. *He that holds out to the End the same shall be saved, Matth. xxiv. 13.*

Since the Gospel of Happiness is set before you in so clear a Light, be zealous to comply with all the holy Commands of it. Give your selves up to *Jesus*, as your Saviour and your Lord. Trust in his Atonement for the Pardon of all your Iniquities: Commit your Souls to the Conduct of his

Word, and to the sanctifying Influences of his Spirit: Imitate the blessed Pattern of so great a Leader, and follow him who has mark'd out the Way to Life and Immortality. *If the Word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience against the Law of Moses, received a just Recompense of Reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a Salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Son of God, and has been publish'd and convey'd down to us from those that heard it? Heb. ii. 2, 3.*

Let us not deceive our selves with vain Hopes, and make our Knowledge of all the disputed Points of Christianity, and the mere Orthodoxy of our Opinions, the Ground of our Expectation of future Glory. Let us not indulge so gross a Mistake, as to put mere Notions in the Room of Practice. An enlightned Head was never designed to serve instead of a sanctified Heart, neither in this World nor that to come. No Forms of Religion, tho' they are divine, no Doctrines, no Articles of Faith, no outward Rites and Ceremonies of Worship, tho' revealed and prescribed by God himself, will answer for the Defect of a holy Life. Could you know the Glories of the Person of *Christ*, and discourse of all his Offices with the Exactness of an Angel, or some unbodied Spirit, could you practise all the Forms of external Christianity to Perfection, yet all these

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these would never recommend you to the divine Favour, without an inward and sincere Love to God and Men: Without this even the chiefest of the Apostles would be but *sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal*, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. A Christian of the brightest Notions, and the most refin'd Speculations, can make no just Pretences to an heavenly Hope, unless he has found the sweet Influence of the Doctrine of *Christ* reforming his Heart, refining his inward Temper, and fitting him for the Business and Blessedness of Heaven. If we would be crown'd we must not only know the Laws of this holy Contest, but we must also run and strive, and fight and wrestle against all Oppositions, and persevere to the End.

Exhort. III. Be solicitous to adorn the Doctrine of God your Saviour, with a Life of such Piety and Goodness, as may render your Faith illustrious and amiable to the World, even to *Atheists and Infidels*. There is something in sublime Virtue and pure Religion, that strikes the Eyes of Men with a sacred Light, and commands the Veneration of the Soul, and that sometimes in Opposition to their own Principles of Sin and Darkness. Disbelievers of the Gospel may first be won over to a good Esteem of our Religion, by the holy and heavenly Behaviour of those who believe; and at last they may be drawn to the Knowledge and Faith of what once they despised,

despised. The Apostle *Peter* recommends this Way of arguing to the pious Women of his Time, 1 *Pet.* iii. 1. and some of them perhaps were not able to dispute much for the Truth. A divine Life has powerful Argument in it, 'tis a Light that not only shines but burns.

And on the other Hand, set a severe Guard on your self, that by your unholy Conduct and vicious Indulgences, you never give Occasion to the Devil to blaspheme, and to estrange his Heart farther from the Gospel. What a dreadful Thing would it be, if at the Bar of *Christ* an Infidel, a condemn'd Infidel, in all the Anguish and Fury of Despair should stand up and tell me, " 'Twas your unchristian and unholy Life
" tempted me first to think there was no-
" thing in Christianity; your Crimes made
" me an Apostate from the Faith, and 'tis
" by your Sins that I perish for ever."

Exhort. IV. If you have any Sollicitude for the Honour and Preservation of the Gospel in the World, if you have any tender Concern for the Souls of Posterity, and the eternal Happiness of the rising Age, Use your utmost Endeavours to plant the Seeds of Christianity in Children, and to propagate the Faith of *Christ* to the next Generation. See that they learn to understand the Principles of the Christian Religion betimes, and that they be not contented with Words and Syllables,

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Syllables, and repeating Terms and Phrases by Heart. Terms and Phrases without Understanding will be but a poor Defence against Infidelity. Teach them the Meaning of every Thing in the Catechisms which they treasure up in their Memory, and let them know what 'tis they are taught to speak and believe.

Lead them also into the Reasons of their Belief of the Gospel: Give them some Arguments why they are *Christians*; furnish their Minds with something to say in Vindication of the Religion they profess, that they be not baffled and beat out of it by every witty Jest, or every cunning Cavil of the Adversary. But I forbear to enlarge here, because I shall speak more on this Head in the next *Section*. In general remember that the Gospel is entrusted with you for the next Generation, and if they lose it and perish thro' your Neglect, the Blood of their Souls may be dreadfully required at your Hands.

Exhort. V. Watch against every Temptation to Apostasy from the Christian Faith, and endeavour to guard and fortify your Children and Friends against Seducers. Perhaps in this dangerous Age you may have met with some Allurements to Infidelity, or your younger Friends may meet with them. *Satan* has many busy Emissaries, many subtle Agents, who with fair Words entice the
Souls

Souls of Men away from the Gospel of *Christ*. Or perhaps you may have been attacked by the Scoffs of wanton Companions, and it may be, some of their impious Cavils have hung about your Imaginations, made too deep an Impression upon your Spirits, and entangled your Thoughts with some of the Artifices of Infidelity. Oh take Heed of these dangerous Snares, as you love your own Souls; and let young Christians be warned against them betimes!

Hearken to the Exhortation of your Friends who love you tenderly, who have met with the same Temptations, and have answered them all by the just Principles of Reasoning, and by the Strength of an holy Faith. With utmost Zeal and Affection for your Souls, we *exhort and testify this is the true Grace of God wherein ye stand*. We have found it so, and desire from our Hearts that you may find it so too. Hear the blessed Apostle *Peter* expressing himself thus to the Christians to whom he wrote, who in those primitive Days were continually in Danger of *being drawn away from their Stedfastness by the Subtilty*, or by the Reproaches of the Unbelievers of that Age, 1 *Pet.* v. 12. And may the following Directions or Advices by the divine Blessing become effectual *Preservatives* to your Souls, against the Danger and Mischief of Infidelity, which is a growing

growing Evil, and a spreading Plague of the Age wherein we live.

S E C T. V.

Preservatives against Apostasy from the Faith of the Gospel.

Advice I. **A** C Q U A I N T your selves with the Evidences of the Truth of Christianity, as far as your Time, your Capacity, and your Circumstances of Life will admit. Enquire into the true Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion. Endeavour to furnish your Minds with such Arguments as will justify your own Conscience in the Belief of the Gospel, and will firmly support your Profession and Practice of it as rational Creatures. God requires that a Creature of Reason should be a reasonable Worshipper.

Tho' 'tis an invaluable Privilege to have enjoy'd a Christian Education, and to be trained up in the Principles and Practices of the true Religion, yet don't content your selves to take up your Religion only upon Trust, and under the mere Influence of the Authority of your Fathers. Dare not build all your Faith and Hope merely upon your Education in a Land which professes the Gospel of *Christ*. 'Tis a very dishonourable Thing to have no more Reason to give why you are a *Christian*, than a young *Turk* has

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Why should I believe in *Mahomet*? for then if you had been born and brought up in *Turkey*, you had also been a *Mahometan*. The Doctrine of *Christ*, as it is in itself the best of Religions, so 'tis built upon the brightest Evidences and the most solid Foundations, and such as are sufficient to convince the Reason of every honest and sincere Enquirer.

Think of the inward Evidences that belong to your Religion itself. Observe how completely it contains all the Doctrines and Duties of the Light of Nature, and exalts them all to a nobler Perfection, than ever any of the ancient Sages of Heathenism could ever arrive at. Think how happily all the Defects of natural Religion are supply'd by the Gospel of *Christ*. Consider how honourably this Religion answers all the Ends and Designs of God as a Creator and a Governor, and all the Necessities and the Desires of his intelligent and immortal Creature Man, since he is fallen from God, and cannot restore himself. And what more can be desired in a Religion revealed from Heaven? *

Meditate on the external Proofs of the Gospel of *Christ*. Count over the many divine Wonders wrought by our blessed Saviour himself, and the amazing Powers com-

* A Treatise in 4to. lately written by Mr. J. R. and intitled *The Religion of Jesus delineated*, is a valuable Book to shew the real inward Excellence and Glory of Christianity.

communicated to the Apostles in Confirmation of their Doctrine: to Behold the exact Accomplishment of many Prophecies given to the World in ancient Days, which have been fulfilled in *Jesus the Messiah*, and his Followers. to Observe the sincere Honesty of the first Propagators of this Religion, who were Eye and Ear-witnesses of the glorious Facts upon which Christianity is founded. * Think of the wondrous Progress that this Religion has made in the World, and triumphed over all the Opposition of Princes and Philosophers, of Men and Devils; and you will find divine Power has gloriously attended it, and evinced its Original to be divine. † Endeavour to gain a solid and rational Satisfaction of the Truth, and Divinity of the holy Bible. There are sufficient Reasons to prove that this is a Book of divine Revelations, which God has made in divers Ages of the World, and given to Men upon special Occasions, in order to lead them into the Knowledge of himself, and the right Way to obtain his Favour and eternal Life.

See *Miscellaneous* and *Sacra*, Edit. V. and Mr. Sam. Chandler's Vindication of the Christian Religion.

* See Mr. John Reynolds's *Third Letter to the Deists*, which is an unanswerable Management and Improvement of this Argument, for the Truth of the Christian Religion.

† See several of these Arguments put together in a plain and convincing Manner in the Bishop of London's late *Pastoral Letter* 1728. Most of them are treated more largely in Dr. Sam. Clark's *Discourse of the Certainty of the Christian Revelation*.

Many of the Writers of it wrought Miracles to confirm the Truth of what they taught, and the rest of the sacred Writings are authorized and confirmed by Men who wrought Miracles.

Acquaint your selves with some of those Books which have been written, especially within these last thirty Years, to prove and establish the Truth of the Religion of *Christ*, in Opposition to the *Deists* and *Infidels* of our Age: And furnish your selves with just and rational Answers to the chief Cavils of our Adversaries, * that you may not be surprised on a sudden by the Subtilty of Men who lye in wait to deceive, and be robbed of the richest Treasure of your Souls, and of your everlasting Hope. Remember the sacred Advice of the Apostle, 1 *Pet.* iii. 15. *Be ready to render to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you: Be ready furnished to give every Man an Account why you are a Christian.*

Advice II. Have a Care of mingling the pure Religion of *Christ* with any human Additions, either of Doctrine or Duty: For this corrupt Mixture will give the Adversaries

* Dr. Nichol in his *Conference with a Theist*, in 5 Parts, in 2 Vol. 8vo. has many solid Solutions of their Cavils, and their proposed Difficulties, tho' perhaps in order to humour the *Deists*, and give them fair Play, he has dress'd up their Arguments in a little too ludicrous or facetious a Style: And he dwells too long and too learnedly on many of them for the Use of common Christians.

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of our Faith a vast Advantage against you? When you shall have framed or received such Articles of Faith, or Rites of Worship, as the Gospel does not contain, and you call this *the Christian Religion*, you disgust an Unbeliever, and tempt him to renounce the whole, because of the Vanity, Folly, or Absurdity of your Additions.

Doubtless this has been the Case frequently in some Christian Countries. The *Papists* have added so large a Medley of their own to the pure Religion of *Jesus*, that the more rational and thinking Men in *Italy* are generally supposed to be *Deists*; for they can never think that such Sort of Christianity as is practised among them, can be a Religion that came from God. And I wish there had never been any Reason to complain in *Protestant* Nations, that such inconsistent Schemes of Doctrines, or of Ceremonies, or both, have sometimes been vended for true Christianity, as has given an unhappy Occasion to Infidels to suspect the Truth of the Gospel itself.

Learn therefore to distinguish well what is pure and simple Christianity, from all the additional Matters which have been mingled with it: For pure Christianity will bear a much better Defence, and you will stand more steadfast in the Belief of it.

Now to this End I would advise you to converse much with the Word of God, and especially

cially with the New Testament, which is more eminently the Rule of our holy Religion. 'Tis there you read the Doctrines and Duties of the Gospel, free from all the Additions of Men, deliver'd in the Language of unquestionable Truth, and in the Words of a divine Teacher, even the holy Spirit. There you learn the Precepts and Rules of Piety and Virtue pure and unmingled with human Traditions. Let this Book be your constant Counsellor, for it is an infallible Guide. Learn your Religion from this Book, and see that you receive nothing as an Article of your Faith or Practice but what is contained therein.

Converse much with those Parts of Scripture wherein the most important Doctrines of Christianity are written, and the greatest and the most necessary Duties of it are plainly prescribed and taught. Particularly acquaint your selves with the History of the Life and Death of *Christ*, and his divine Instructions, as they are recorded in the four Gospels. Read the Epistles of *St. Paul* to the *Romans*, and to the *Ephesians*, and value most those Discourses and Writings of Men, which come nearest to these divine Standards.

Treasure up in your Memory such Passages of Scripture as are best suited to teach and confirm the chief Articles of your Faith and Practice, and let them be written upon
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your Heart. The more Instruction you get from the Word of God in this Holy Religion, the more you will love it, and be established in it. And you will not be so soon shaken with every Wind of Doctrine, as if you borrowed all your Knowledge of Christianity, merely from the Forms and the Lessons Men have taught you. Remember that Christ Jesus is your only Master and Lord, and he is the same Yesterday, to Day and for ever.

In all the momentous Enquiries and Concerns of your Religion, whether they be Points of Faith or Practice, run continually to this sacred Touch-stone the Word of God, and try every Thing by this unerring Rule. Frame your Belief and your Conversation according to this divine Model. All Builders, whether they labour in Wood or Stone, take Care to have their Rule, their Square, their Plumb-line always at

* Perhaps it may be necessary in this Place to insert a Caution, lest any should imagine I would here exclude *Catechisms* larger or smaller, and turn out *Systems* of Divinity from the Use of the Schools, Churches or Families. This is very far from my Thoughts: I am a constant Friend of, and Advocate for those *Compendiums* or *Systematical* Writings; their Use and Advantage is so great, that I think it hardly possible to teach any Religion well, and particularly the Christian, without them. All that I advise here is, that Children and Youth should be led with all due Speed, as their Understandings admit, to see the Articles of their Catechisms contained in their Bibles, and proved plainly by the Word of God. And that they should be led by Degrees to derive their Knowledge and Faith more immediately from the Bible, and build their Religion upon it.

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Hand to direct their Work, and to prove the Truth of it. We are also Builders of our heavenly Hope upon *Christ* the divine Foundation. Let all our Belief and Profession, all our Labours and Advances in this sacred Work, be regulated by a perpetual Recourse to the sacred Rule that God has bestowed upon us, that our Faith may stand the Trial of Men in a Day of Temptation, and that our Work may stand the Test, and approve it self to God at the last Day, in the Face of Men and Angels.

Advice III. Ever maintain upon your Spirits an awful Sense of the Evil and Guilt of your past Sins, of the Holiness and Justice of the great God, who has threatened to punish Sinners with everlasting Misery, and then the Gospel which discovers pardoning Grace will be ever dear to you, and Jesus the Son of God the Saviour will appear so desirable, that you will never part with him.

Be strict in the Observation of your own Heart and Life, and compare it frequently with the perfect Law of God: And then you will find such daily and continual Returns of Guilt upon your Conscience, by the evil Working of your Passions, by the Disorders of your Spirits, by the frequent Commission of Sins, and the Defects of your best Duties, that you will highly value the Gospel of *Christ*, the Discoveries of
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divine Grace, and the Doctrine of Reconciliation by the Blood of Atonement.

Make Use of every fresh Commission of Sin, as a Means to awaken your first Sense of the great and dreadful Evil of it, and of your Desert of Death and Hell, for the Violation of God's holy Law: This will make you love the Doctrine of the *Priesthood of Christ*: You will delight in contemplating the Glory of his Person, who could become an all-sufficient Sacrifice to expiate the Guilt of your Iniquities, and to deliver you from everlasting Death.

If we lose this Tenderness of Conscience, and look upon Sin as a little or harmless Thing, 'tis no Wonder that the Doctrine of Salvation by *Jesus Christ* sinks in your Esteem, and you will be easily drawn away from the Gospel of *Christ*. A common, cold and unaffected Complaint of the Infirmities of Human Nature, and the general Notion of the Mercy of God will be ready to make such a stupid Conscience easy, and you will be tempted to run back from the Gospel of Grace to the Religion of Nature: But if you keep upon your own Hearts a perpetual deep Sense of the heinous Evil and dreadful Demerit of Sin, the Cavils of Infidels against the Gospel will have but little Force upon your Souls, unless they could shew you a better Way to obtain Forgiveness, than the Atonement of the Son of God.

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Advice IV. *Take all Occasions to observe the inward Corruption of your own Nature, the sinful Tendencies of your Spirits, the evil Passions which dwell in you, your natural Aversion to strict Holiness, and your Weakness to fulfil those very Duties which the Light of Nature requires: And at the same Time survey the Temptations of a sinful World, which lie all around you, and attend you in every Motion, to allure or affright you from God and Goodness.*

While these Things are fresh and lively upon the Spirit, you will maintain an high Esteem for the Gospel of *Christ*, wherein there is so much Relief given to the Weakness of Nature, by the Force of divine Motives, and by the Influences of the holy Spirit. There are rich Treasures of Grace provided to rectify the Disorders of our degenerate Nature, and to make us Conquerors over the Temptations of the World.

Meditate often on your own Weakness, to practise what Conscience dictates, and God and Reason command. Think of the Perfection of the Law of God, that it reaches to your very Thoughts, and then think what a Law or evil Principle there is in your Members, warring against the Law of your Minds, and ready at every Turn to bring you into Captivity. Think how weak you are to subdue the Sin that dwells in you, and to resist the Temptations of a corrupt and degenerate Age. Then you will highly esteem

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esteem the Gospel which furnishes you with the most powerful Assistances for this End, and you will find that no Religion on Earth pretends to any such valuable Relief, under this Distress and Impotence. There is no Salvation or Remedy for ruin'd Man, comparable to that contained in the blessed Gospel.

Then you will value the *powerful and heavenly Motives* which the Gospel proposes to awaken your Hatred against Sin, to turn your unwilling Heart to strict Holiness, and to change the corrupt Inclinations of your Souls. Such glorious *Motives* are derived from the Love of God, from the Serenity and Peace of Conscience, from the Fears of an eternal Hell, and from the Hopes of eternal Happiness, as no other Religion can furnish you with. You will then see how gloriously the Gospel animates all the Professors of it, to pursue great and exalted Degrees of Holiness, by the illustrious Examples of the Saints in all Ages, and by the Practice of *Jesus the Son of God at the Head of them.* *Heb. xii. 1. We have a blessed Cloud of Witnesses gone before us,* who assure us from the Experiments they have made, that Sin may be subdued, that Temptation may be resisted, that corrupt Nature may be formed into the Likeness of God, and that those Attainments which seem impossible to Man, when left to the mere Principles of Nature,

have been possess'd by the Disciples of Christ, and the Believers of his Gospel.

And above all remember the *promised Aids of the holy Spirit*, to enlighten our dark Minds, to subdue our rebellious Wills, to change our unholy Natures, and bring them into a Conformity to God and his Son. The Aids of this Spirit are promised and given to those who seek them in the right Way, by addressing God the Father in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ.

Advice V. *Think now and then of the wretched and deplorable State of the Heathen World, who have no Knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, and remember what you owe to this blessed Gospel.* Alas, for the Heathen Nations! In what gross Darkness their Souls are buried! How confused and absurd are their Notions, even of the true God, and the Religion of Nature? How ridiculous is their Worship? how cruel and barbarous are many of their Superstitions? how are they immersed in Vice? how abominable are many of their Practices, and how profligate are their Lives? how few of them have either thought or acted agreeably to the Principles of Reason, or to the Dignity of human Nature, or to the last Revelation that was given to their Fathers, *i. e.* the Religion of Noah? What a dismal Account does St. Paul give of them, who was the Apostle of the Gentiles, and knew them well! They were
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filled with all Unrighteousness, Fornication, Wickedness, Covetousness, Maliciousness, full of Envy, Murder, Debate, Deceit, Malignity, Whisperers, Backbiters, Haters of God, despiteful, proud, Boasters, Inventors of evil Things, disobedient to Parents, without Understanding, Covenant-breakers, without natural Affection, implacable, unmerciful: They turn the Truth of God into a Lye, and his Glory into the Image of corruptible Things, Beasts and Fishes, and worship the Creature more than the Creator: They are enslaved to the Devil, the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that works in the Children of Disobedience, Strangers from the Covenant of Promise, having no Hope, and without God in the World, they have their Understanding darkned, being alienated from the Life of God, thro' the Ignorance and Blindness of their Heart, and give themselves over to Lasciviousness, to work all Uncleaness with Greediness. I know I have cited several of these Scriptures before, but I cannot help the Repetition of them on this Occasion. Several other such dismal and shameful Accounts does the Apostle give us of their State and Practice. Travellers in modern Ages inform us of the same miserable Corruptions and impious Manners of the Savages in the Wilds of *Africa* and *America*: And perhaps we had been in the same State to this Day, if the Light of the Gospel had never shone on the *British* Islands. 'Tis

'Tis true, there have been some few Countries of the *Heathen* World, a little re-form'd and polish'd by the Light of Nature, and by some Commerce with the Lands who have enjoy'd Revelation: But let it be remember'd, that far the greatest Part of them have lost the traditional Remains of the Religion of *Noah*, and are over-run with brutish Ignorance and Impiety: Many of them worship the Devil instead of the true God. Let it be observed also, that 'tis concerning the learned and polite Nations of *Greece* and *Rome*, that *St. Paul* brings in such a black Catalogue of impious and abominable Practices: 'Tis the Gospel that has refined the Nations where it has been received, 'tis the Gospel that has taken off the brutal Character, and made them act like Men.

What were the ancient Inhabitants of *Great Britain*? their Light of Nature and Reason lay buried under a Heap of wild Superstitions and bloody Practices, before the Gospel appeared among them: Nor is there any Reason to think, that we should have been wiser or better than our Ancestors, if we had never heard of *Christ* and the Bible.

Our modern Deists and Apostates from Christianity, are too vain and assuming, when they pretend to have spun out of their own Understandings, any such Schemes as
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they would give us for the Religion of Nature, as tho' they borrow'd nothing from the Prophets and Apostles. Why did not our infidel Fathers in the Days of *Cassibelan* and *Arviragus*,* frame as good a System of Religion as their infidel Sons pretend to do? 'Tis the Light of the Gospel has open'd the Understandings of Men, and awaken'd the natural Light of Reason, to display it self in fairer Colours; and yet with a prophane Ingratitude they deride this divine Light, and with strange Vanity they boast of their Pretences to a better Religion, than the Bible has taught us.

But let us who wear the honourable Name of *Christian*, give Glory to the Grace of our Saviour, while we survey and pity the *Heathen* World immers'd in Wickedness, and in brutal Follies. Let us remember and adore the rising Sun of Righteousness, that has scatter'd the Clouds and thick Darkness from amongst us, and has introduced the Light of Life. And then let us ask our selves this plain Question, *Are we willing to part with this Bible, and renounce this Gospel?*

Advice VI. *Meditate particularly on the glorious and inestimable Advantages that are derived to us from the Religion of Christ, the blessed Change of our State here in this Life,*

* Two Princes of Britain, one in the Days of *Julius Caesar*, and one in the Time of *Domitian*.

the glorious Hope in Death, and the joyful Expectation of future Felicity. What an amazing Difference between a blind *Heathen*, who knows not the true God, nor loves him, nor performs his Duty to him, and an enlightned *Christian* who knows and loves, who worships and obeys his Creator and his God! between a *Pagan* drencht in brutal Vices, in shameful Immorality and Impiety, and a Disciple of *Christ* cleansed from his Sins in the Blood of *Jesus*, and renew'd in the Image of his heavenly Father! What a glorious and joyful Difference between the Inhabitants of *Corinth* when they were Fornicators, Idolaters, Adulterers, Abusers of themselves by unnatural Lusts, Thieves, covetous, Drunkards, Revilers, Extortioners, and the same Persons when they were washed, when they were justified, when they were sanctify'd in the Name of the Lord *Jesus*, and by the Spirit of our God. What a surprising and blessed Change among the other Gentiles, when instead of the Works of the Flesh, Uncleanneſs, Witchcraft, Hatred, Wrath, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenneſs, and Revellings, they were bleſt with the Fruits of the Spirit, Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith, Meekneſs, Temperance. If Christianity hath not made this Change every where conspicuous, it is because Men take up with the mere Name of a Christian, and rest there contented,

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contented, but neither seek nor desire the Power and Spirit and Life of this divine Religion in their Hearts or their Conversation.

But let us pass on from the Scenes of Life to a dying Bed, and meditate the infinite Advantages attending that important Hour, which are derived from Christianity and the Gospel. Behold a *Heathen*, whose Course of Life hath been made up of Folly and Guilt, now lying down in the Dust, groaning and expiring as a Brute groans and expires, stupid and thoughtless of Immortality. See another perhaps deceiving himself with vain Dreams and Fables of a sensual and luxurious Paradise in some invisible Regions: Think of these wretched Creatures laden with the Guilt of all their past Sins, entering into an unknown Eternity, *without Christ, without God, and without any just and solid Hope.*

Or come to the Bed-side of a modern Infidel, in his last Moments, who in his Days of Health apostatised from the Faith of *Christ*, and renounced and derided the Gospel: Perhaps you will find him like a harden'd Sinner, obstinately deaf to all Thoughts of God and Religion, to all the Monitions of his Friends, and the Remonstrances of his own Conscience, unable to bear the Reflections of his Mind, and therefore subduing them all, resolv'd to plunge

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himself

himself headlong into the ABYSS of Futurity, and take an immense Leap from one World to the other in the dark. Another of the same Tribe perhaps with some Difficulty has persuaded himself, that his Sins have not been many nor great, because he has neither been guilty of Theft, Murder, or Adultery; and therefore with much ado he supports his Spirits by a philosophical Courage and a laboured Hope, that the infinite Mercy of God will forgive his Follies, tho' he has abandon'd all the Revelations of Mercy, and the Promises of pardoning Grace. Behold a third, whose awakened Conscience cries too loud for him not to hear it, and scourges his Soul with cutting Reproaches for his past Crimes, while he lies on the Edge of Life within the View of the Judgment-seat of God? Now the little Cavils against the Bible, that pass for Arguments in his gay and healthy Hours, appear to have no Force in them: Those impious Jests which he threw out wantonly against the Gospel, afford him not the least Glimpse of Merriment, but pierce his Heart with inward and sharp Remorse: All his feeble and false Pretences to Sincerity, which once gave him a little thin Shelter, now vanish, nor will make so much as the Shadow of a Screen from the dreadful Presages of approaching Vengeance. He groans, he dies, under the keenest Anguish of Despair,

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spair, and leaves behind him a terrible Warning to succeeding Apostates.

But let us leave these dark Scenes of Infidelity and Terror, and approach the dying Bed of a *Christian*, whose Religion has been the Business of his Heart and Life, see the holy Man lying cheerful under the Pains of dying Nature, rejoicing in the Hope of the Pardon of Sin, and a reconciled God, keeping fast his Hold of the Promises of Mercy, and of *Jesus* the Saviour, by repeated Exercises of Faith and Love, meeting the last Enemy *Death*, with a serene Joy in his Countenance, and with Triumph in his Soul, quitting Flesh and Blood and all the Scenes of Mortality with a sacred Delight, and entering into a new World of perfect Holiness and perfect Peace, to dwell for ever with his God and his Saviour.

Upon such a Comparison of Things, such a Survey and Prospect as this, where is the Man that would not say, *Let me die the Death of a Christian, and my last End be like his?*

Come, let us dwell a little on the glorious Discoveries of the heavenly World which the Gospel has made, till our Desires are warmed, and our Zeal kindled to pursue and enjoy these sacred and sublime Felicities, which infinitely transcend all the Fancies of a Heathen Paradise, and rise high above our own present Ideas.

'Tis the Happiness provided for Saints in the future State, to dwell with God ; to see, know and converse with him, even with that glorious infinite Spirit who made them ; to receive everlasting Impressions of his Love, and to love him again with most intense Delight and Satisfaction of Soul ; to be for ever present with *Jesus* the Son of God, *the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person* ; to survey all his wondrous Glories, and to learn the amazing Transactions of his Grace, his early Counsels, his condescending Labour and Sufferings for the Salvation of Man ; to be swallowed up in holy Pleasure in the midst of those transporting Wonders ; to dwell in the midst of Angels and Archangels, blessed Spirits of high Rank and Dignity, Creatures of penetrating intellectual Powers, and of unfullied Purity ; to converse with Fellow-saints freed from all the Infirmities of fleshly Nature ; and to maintain a holy Intercourse of Knowledge upon all Things divine and human, upon every Theme that is worthy of the Notice of a blessed and immortal Spirit.

This is Part of the Business of that Heaven which separate Souls enjoy : But the Resurrection of the Body makes a large Addition to these Scenes of Felicity, when the Soul shall be again furnish'd with corporeal Powers, and shall be entertain'd with
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a rich Variety of Objects suited to those Powers, all conspiring toward the more complete Satisfaction of the indwelling Spirit. There our whole Nature shall take in such Objects *as Eye has not seen, as Ear has not heard, nor the Heart of Man conceived*; and all with an intense Relish of sacred Pleasure. And above and beyond all this, the eternal Duration of this holy and happy State, spreads a new Satisfaction thro' all the Inhabitants of that happy World: This completes our Heaven indeed, when we shall feel our selves in the midst of the Possession of those Joys which we are firmly assured shall have no Interruption, no End.

Let us meditate on such a Heaven as this is, which our Lord *Jesus Christ* proposes to all his Disciples. There is no such Recompence of Virtue, no such refin'd and noble Delights to be found among all the Fables of the *Heathen Poets and Priests*, or the dark Reasonings of *Heathen Philosophers*. They are but very poor, imperfect and foolish Stories that the best of those Philosophers tell us concerning the Happiness of Souls in the future State: Mean and low Pleasures some of them have proposed for virtuous Minds in the other World: Others of them tell you, that these Delights shall have an End by an universal Revolution of all Things, and the Souls of the Blessed coming to act their Parts again in this World,

World, after a long Distance of Years: And the best of these Reasoners have sometimes owned themselves at a Loss, whether there be any State of Futurity or no; whether there be any Reward for the Righteous beyond the Grave. 'Tis the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, that has not only discovered to us the eternal Purposes of divine Love, and the Grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the World began, but 'tis he also who has abolish'd Death, and has brought Life and Immortality to Light thro' the Gospel. And 'tis in the Virtue of these Things that the Apostle Paul rejoices in his present Sufferings, and is not ashamed of them. 2 Tim. i. 9, 10, &c. For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that Day.

If we would stand fast in the Faith of Christ, let us imitate this blessed Man: Let us think much and often of the final Prize of Glory: Let this incorruptible Crown be kept ever in our Eye, and it will have a sweet and powerful Influence upon us to keep close to the Rules of the sacred Contest, in order to attain the Crown and Prize. The Glories promised in the Gospel to Overcomers, will sweetly constrain us to run this holy Race, and to fight the good Fight of Faith till we obtain the Crown.

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Advice VII. *As God hath set forth the Mediation of Christ, and the Influences of the Spirit for the Life of our Souls in his Gospel, so let us daily live upon Christ and his Spirit, by holy Dependence and Resignation of Soul.* Let your Trust in him be constant and explicit: Never address the great God in Worship, without a direct Eye to the Mediator. Live upon his atoning Sacrifice, and his powerful Intercession under a continual Sense of your own Sins and Defects: Let the Name of Christ be ever dear to your Thoughts, and rest on it as the only Foundation of your Hope of Acceptance: Apply your selves constantly to seek the Influences of the good Spirit, under a Sense of your own Weakness and Insufficiency.

I have been often thinking, that the great Neglect of these two divine Doctrines and Blessings, (*viz.*) the proper Atonement of Christ, and the promised Assurances of the Spirit, among some of those who profess to believe the Gospel, has been one considerable Occasion of the Growth of Deism among us. For when Christians themselves shall make these peculiar Privileges, and chief Glories of our revealed Religion needless, a sceptical Person is ready to fancy, that the Light of Nature is sufficient to teach us all the rest, and then what Need is there of Revelation?

Remember the sacred Names into which you are baptized: Surely the great and blessed Offices of the *Son* and *Spirit*, are designed to run thro' our holy Religion in the practical Parts of it, *to the End of the World*. Ever follow this Method of Access to God the *Father*, by the Mediation, Death and Intercession of his *Son*, and thro' the Aids of the blessed *Spirit*. Let this Form of Religion be wrought into the very Temper of your Spirits in an habitual Manner, till you feel your Soul *live by the Faith of the Son of God*, and the *Grace of the holy Spirit*, as you feel and find the animal Life of your Body preserved by the constant repeated Appetites of Hunger and Thirst, and the Satisfaction of them by proper Meat and Drink. St. Paul was in no great Danger of departing from the Doctrine of the Gospel, while he could speak from his own inward Experience, and say, *the Life that I now live in the Flesh, I live by the Faith of the Son of God who has loved me, and given himself for me*, Gal. ii. 20. And this naturally leads me to the next Advice.

Advice VIII. *Tho' you have attained never so clear an Evidence of the Truth of Christianity by Reason and Argument, yet never rest satisfied without the Power and Pleasure of Religion wrought deep in your Hearts*. Never content your selves with the mere outward Forms of a Christian, and a cold Round of Duties

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Duties, according to the Dictates of the Gospel: Such a Circle of formal Practices, even of the best Religion, will be but a poor Drudgery, and a heavy Task, which you will be ready to relinquish in an Hour of Temptation, if the Power, the Love, and Delight of this Religion, be not rooted in your Souls. This is what the Apostle means, *Eph. iii. 13, &c.* when he intreats the *Ephesians*, *not to faint at the Tribulations which attend the Gospel*, and therefore he prays for them thus, (*viz.*) *That God would grant according to the Riches of his Glory, that ye be strengthened with Might by the Spirit in the inner Man, that Christ may dwell in your Hearts by Faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in Love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the Breadth and Length, and Depth and Height, and to know the Love of Christ which passeth Knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the Fulness of God.*

When you find your Faith in *Christ* as your High-priest, giving a glorious Relief to your Soul, under a Sense of Guilt and Imperfections; when you feel the Doctrines of his Grace speaking Peace to your Conscience, and Pardon thro' the Blood of the Son of God; when you experience a divine and universal Change wrought in the very Temper of your Spirit, by the Influence of the Precepts and the Promises of the

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Bible;

Bible; when you find such a sacred Love to God and Men as the Gospel recommends, wrought in your Hearts by this Gospel; when your perverse Appetites and sinful Passions are mortified by the Power of this Religion, and your Souls are made holy and heavenly, and fit for Converse with God, you will then have an inward, settled and comfortable Evidence within your selves, that this is a divine Religion indeed.

1 *John* v. 10. *He that believes has the Witness in himself:* And you will not easily be turned aside, from the Belief and Profession of this Gospel, for you have felt it to be the Power of God for the Salvation of your Souls.

Advice IX. *When you are satisfied of the Truth of Christianity upon just and reasonable Grounds, make it your constant Prayer to God the Father of Spirits to establish you in this Faith, and to preserve you from every Temptation to Infidelity.* As we must invoke the divine Assistance, to lead us into all Truth in our first Enquiries in Religion, so we must be constant Addressers at the Throne of Grace, that the same divine Spirit the Enlightner and Instructor may dwell with us, to establish our Souls in the Truth; and especially in such a Day of Temptation as this is, we have Need to be more constant and importunate in our Petitions to Heaven on this Account. 'Tis the Spirit of
God

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God that enlightens us in the Knowledge of the Gospel, and he *seals our Souls unto the Day of Redemption.* He continues the Communications of his own divine Light to those that seek it. He is promised to *abide with the Disciples of Christ for ever,* and to *dwell in them* as a Spring of Light and Holiness. If we begin to grow self-sufficient, we begin to depart from the Gospel, and we lay our selves open to the Power of every Temptation. Solomon the wisest of Men assures us, *He that trusts in his own Heart is a Fool,* Prov. xxviii. 26. And the Man that presumes upon his own Understanding, or his own Strength, is very near to Apostasy. Peter was a terrible Instance of this Folly: He boasted of his Courage above the rest of the Disciples, and he was the only Man that denied his Lord.

Advice X. *When you are once established upon just Grounds in the Faith of the Gospel, do not rashly expose your selves to Temptation.* Don't run into a free Conversation with Infidels and Apostates, without a plain Call of Providence. A needless Indulgence of Dispute, and Fondness of Controversy upon this Subject with subtil Men, who lye in wait to deceive, has too often exposed young Christians, and shaken their Faith. Tho' there be various and abundant Proof of the Truth of the Gospel, and it may be well defended upon the Foot of right Reason,

yet every one is not fit to enter into these Debates with Men of Wit and Learning, who are engaged on the Side of Infidelity. Common plain Christians should rather abstain from such Sort of Conferences, as will fill their Minds with Cavils against the Scripture, and Objections against the Gospel. You know not what unhappy Impressions a prophane Jest, or a shrewd Cavil may make upon your Spirits: And as the Devil is an Enemy to the Doctrine and Kingdom of *Christ*, so we have just Reason to believe, that he is ever ready to assist the infidel Party. Where the Gospel is publish'd with sufficient Evidence St. *Paul* tells us, that it is *the God of this World that blinds the Minds of those that believe not*, 2 Cor. iv. 4. And he is ever ready to help them raise a Dust, and to blind others.

A witty Scoff thrown out against the Truth, may pierce the Mind deeper, and stick longer than a solid Argument to support the Truth. How well soever you fancy your self settled in the Principles of your holy Religion, yet perhaps you may hear some new subtil Objections, or some witty Turn upon the sacred History of the Bible, that may weaken your Belief, when you have not an Answer ready at Hand to ward off the Force of it. Some have been taken and ruin'd in our Age by these Snares of the Devil, who have thought themselves as safe as you. If

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If the Providence of God plainly call you into an infected House, and evident Duty require you to venture your Life in the midst of the Pestilence, you may humbly hope for divine Preservation and Security: But if you venture without a Call, you have Reason to dread the Event. A sincere and humble Christian may be led by the Course of his Duty into such dangerous Company, and he may hope for the Assistance of the Spirit, and the Grace of God to fill his Mouth with Arguments, and enable him to defend his Faith with holy Skill and Courage: But if he mingle himself in such Sort of Conversation at every Turn, without any evident Call of Providence, and out of a mere idle Curiosity of Spirit, or from a Presumption of the Strength of his own Faith or Arguments, he has but little Reason to hope for divine Protection from these dangerous and fatal Snares.

Advice XI. *When you see just Reason to believe the Gospel of Christ, and have your Faith confirm'd in it by solid Evidence, let not every Objection and Cavil which you cannot answer shake your Stedfastness, and cast you into Doubts again.* This is the common Practice of Infidels, whereby they deceive themselves, and it has been Part of their Craft in all Ages, in order to deceive others; they turn away their Eyes from the bright Evidence which is given to the Gospel, and wink

wink at the glorious Lights that surround it, while they dwell on some little Dark-
nesses that attend it. They call off the Eyes
of others from the rational and convincing
Evidence, in order to fix them upon some
of these Obscurities and difficult Passages in
Scripture, which are not so easy to be ex-
plain'd or accounted for, by Reason of our
great Distance from the Times, when those
Affairs were transacted, and those Parts of
Scripture were written. And 'tis by these
subtil Methods that they obtain their chief
Success, and deceive unwary and unstable
Souls. 'Tis your safest Way therefore to
keep your Minds intent upon the plain
Force of Argument, drawn from Miracles
and Prophecies, and Gifts of the Spirit, as
well as from the inward Excellencies of
Christianity, whereby 'tis sufficiently proved
to be a divine Religion; and let not any
little Cavils which are raised against parti-
cular Passages in the Bible, intangle your
Thoughts, or shake your Faith, which is
built upon such firm and rational Founda-
tions. While Reason itself stands on the
Side of Christianity, let not a few puzzling
Questions make you forget the Force of that
Reason which establishes the Gospel.

The venerable and pious Dr. Owen spake
excellently well on this Point, at the End
of his little Treatise on the *Doctrine of the
Trinity*. " 'Tis a Rule among Philoso-
phers,

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“ phers, that if a Man on just Grounds
 “ and Reasons hath embraced any Opini-
 “ on or Persuasion, he is not to desert it
 “ merely because he cannot answer every
 “ Objection against it. For if the Objecti-
 “ ons wherewith we may be entangled, be
 “ not of the same Weight and Importance
 “ with the Reasons on which we embraced
 “ any Opinion, it is a Madness to forego
 “ it on the Account thereof. And much
 “ more must this hold amongst the common
 “ Sort of Christians in Things spiritual and
 “ divine. If they will let go and part with
 “ their Faith in any Truth, because they
 “ are not able to answer distinctly some
 “ Objections that may be made against it,
 “ they may quickly find themselves dis-
 “ puted into Atheism.”

When we have taken a just Survey of the Arguments, whereby the Religion of *Christ* is supported, when we have seen and felt the united and convincing Force of them, let us rest establish'd in our Faith: 'Tis not an advisable Thing for private Christians, out of a curious or wanton Humour, to hearken after the Cavils of Infidelity, no more than to frequent their Company. 'Tis unsafe for them to attend to the Quarrels which the Men of prophane Wit have raised against the Word of God: Nor should they do it, unless divine Providence calls them to it as a Part of their Duty, and gives them

them Time and Leisure to enter anew into the Controversy, to lay open the Objections, and to search out sufficient Answers to them. Where any of these Objections hang about the Mind of a humble Christian, let him speedily propose his Scruples to a skilful Minister, or a learned Friend, that he may get rid of them as soon as possible, by clear and just Solution of the Difficulty that perplexes them.

Avoid the first Workings of Apostasy in the Bottom of your Heart: *Take Heed* (says the Apostle to the converted *Hebrews*) *lest there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief, in departing from the living God, and lest you be harden'd thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin,* Heb. iii. 12. While you give Ear to the little Criticisms and Sophistries of the Adversary, remember you are upon slippery Ground: Look well to your Feet, lest you are betray'd on a sudden, and carry'd away into frightful Lengths of Doubt and Darkness, for want of a helping Hand near you.

'Tis true, the Gospel of *Christ* has strong and immoveable Foundations richly sufficient for the Support of it; there are abundant Vindications of it publish'd in the World, against all the Assaults of Wit and Reasoning. But a sly and perplexing Sophism may be cast into the Mind, and seize the Soul in an unguarded Hour, when you may not have an Answer ready at Hand,
and

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and the Poison may penetrate too far, and corrupt the Mind before the Antidote is found and apply'd.

Advice XII. *Maintain a Solemnity of Spirit, and a serious Temper of Mind in all your Enquiries and Discourses on a Theme of such everlasting Importance.* While our modern Deists affect to shew themselves Men of Wit, and make a Jest serve for an Argument, they don't appear to be in good earnest enquiring the Way to please God, and save their own Souls. *God, and Souls, and Eternity,* are no trivial Ideas. 'Tis no ludicrous Matter to treat or discourse of them. Such Jestors have no Reason to hope for divine Irradiations.

If you have Occasion to speak of the obscure and difficult Parts of Scripture, do it not in a trifling Humour, or with a licentious Levity of Spirit, nor indulge your Lips to mix them with Sneer and Merriment. 'Tis dangerous to jest with Weapons that will wound the Soul. When Christians give themselves a Loose, and venture at this Rate upon the Borders of Prophaneness, they may be left of God, and be righteously given up to a Spirit of Unbelief. There are those, who once thought themselves Believers in *Christ*, but by sporting on the Borders of this Precipice with wanton and unwary Feet, they have found themselves carried down strangely into the Deeps of

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Apostasy:

Apostasy: They have at last learned roundly to renounce *Christ* whom they worshipped, and ridicule the Gospel which they once rever'd; they have been plunged into Vices which they once abhor'd; they have let go the Name of *Christ*, and God has let them go out of his holy keeping, till at last they have become perfect *Heathens* in every Sense, without Virtue or Truth, *without Hope and without God in the World.* The almighty Governor of the World has made some tremendous Monuments of Justice and Vengeance; his Warning-pieces demand our awful Notice.

Advice XIII. *Think often how much safer you are in the Profession and Practice of Christianity, than if you should relinquish the Gospel, and change it for mere natural Religion.* And the Reason is plain, for the *Doctrine of Christ* contains every Thing in it which *natural Religion* pretends to discover. All that is necessary by the Light of Nature for us to believe and to practise, both with Regard to God and Man, is included in the holy Bible.

Therefore if the *Deist* be in the right, the *Christian* is certainly safe, for he worships the one true God, and fulfils his Duty toward his Neighbour; and there are none who pretend that God will damn or destroy Men for entertaining a few other Principles, which had so much Evidence of coming from
Heaven

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Heaven to supply what was deficient in the Light of Nature, even if they should not at last be found to be true, since they are perfectly consistent with all our Duty to God and Man. But on the other Hand, if the *Religion of Christ* be divine, then the Infidels, especially in *Great Britain* or in *London*, who have such glorious Advantages for Knowledge, can hardly excuse themselves, or hope for Acceptance: For they deny those very Parts of Christianity which are necessary to supply the Defects of the Light of Nature. They deny the Atonement of *Christ*, and the Pardon of Sin thro' the Vertue of his Atonement; they deny *Jesus* to be the great Prophet and the Saviour of Mankind; whereas he himself has told us by Commission from the Father, *If ye believe not that I am he ye shall die in your Sins*. They deny the special and necessary Doctrines of that Gospel, which was commanded to be preached to the World with this Threatning, *he that believeth not shall be damned*, Mark xvi. 16.

Advice XIV. Consider seriously the dismal State of Apostates who depart from the Gospel of *Christ*, and renounce their Faith in *Jesus the Saviour*. Consider the Threatnings, the dreadful Threatnings of the Word of God pronounced against Apostasy. Let such solemn Words as those with which the Apostle warns the Christian *Hebrews*, dwell

ever upon your Mind in all the sacred Influence and divine Terror of them. Heb. ii. 2, 3. If the Word spoken by Angels was steadfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience received a just Recompence of Reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them Witness both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles and Gifts of the holy Ghost, according to his Will? Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightned, and have tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance; seeing they crucifie to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame. Heb. x. 26. — 29, 38, 39. If we sin wilfully (i. e. renounce the Gospel of Christ) after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful Expectation of Judgment, and of fiery Indignation which shall devour the Adversaries. He that despised Moses Law died without Mercy, of how much sorer Punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath troden under Foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing, and hath done Despite to the Spirit of Grace? Vengeance is mine,

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mine, I will recompence, saith the Lord. It had been better for them (as St. Peter expresses it) not to have known the Way of Righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto them, 2 Pet. ii. 21.

Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his Saints, to execute Judgment upon ungodly Sinners, and to accomplish the Terrors written against the fearful and the unbelieving, as well as the abominable and the Murderers, and all Liars; against those who are afraid to profess his Gospel, and those who deny the Truth of it; against those who sin against the Truth, and turn it into a Lye; against those who resist the bright Evidence of Christianity, and by refusing to believe the Record which God has given of his Son, make him a Liar also. Behold he comes in the Clouds, and in flaming Fire, to take Vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and they shall be punish'd with everlasting Destruction, from the Presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of his Power. The Judge is at the Door, he is ready to be revealed from Heaven with his mighty Angels, to fulfil the Curses written in his Book against those who have renounced his Doctrine, and rejected his Salvation. How will the Apostates from Christianity be able to lift up their Heads in that Day, or endure the

the Sight of his Majesty? What will you say, when ye shall see that illustrious and divine Person array'd in the Robes of Power and Judgment, and attended with ten thousand flaming Ministers of Justice, whose Laws ye have refused to obey, and whose Grace ye have disdain'd to receive? What will ye say for your selves who have known and rejected him, who have abandon'd his Grace and his Laws together, after ye had once seen Reason to receive them? What will they do in that Day who *have seen and yet hated* the Lord of Glory? What an Extasy of Surprize and Terror will seize your Spirits, when ye shall behold him enthron'd and frowning as a provoked Ruler of the World, whom ye once derided as a poor wild Enthusiast, and made him the Subject of your Mirth and Mockery, or ye called him a vile Impostor, and treated him with impious Indignities? What do ye think will become of you, if the Day should come, when the *Lamb of God* shall appear as *the Lion of the Tribe of Judah*, and you should be forced to *call to the Rocks and Mountains to fall upon you, and cover you from his Wrath*? What Skreen do ye think can defend you from his avenging Power? or what Mercy can ye expect from his Hands when you practis'd this Iniquity in Opposition to such Light and Evidence, as were diffused round about you in *Great Britain*?

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Perhaps you may laugh at the Solemnity of this Representation, and despise these Scenes of Terror as a painted Fire; but methinks if there be but a Possibility that these Things should be true, it would be a Point of Wisdom to provide against the Dangers of such a dreadful Hour: One would think it should awaken you, at least to be exceeding serious, sincere and diligent in surveying all the Evidences of the Gospel, before you dare reject such a Saviour, and expose your selves to his Indignation without Hope. And where there are so many fair Appearances of just and solid Reasoning, as there are on the Side of Christianity, methinks you should not dare to give your Lips a Loose in prophane Ridicule and Scorn: Nor should you suffer some little Darkneses and Difficulties in the Books of the New Testament, to prevail against all the brighter Discoveries of Truth and Argument, which support the Religion of *Christ*.

If you have any Love to your Souls, let me intreat you to consider, that however you may be disgusted at some Things contained in the Records of our holy Religion, yet you can never prove, that the Religion itself is false, in the main Principles of it, as represented in those Records: And remember this, that when your Spirits are gone into the invisible World, if there you
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should find that *Jesus*, whom ye once derided, to be Lord and Judge of all, there is no more Sacrifice for Sin, no Rectification of your obstinate Errors, no Repentance, no Pardon there; but you must perish under his just Indignation, and your Souls are lost for ever.

But I turn my Discourse to the Disciples of the blessed *Jesus*, who believe in his Name, and obey his Gospel.

Happy Persons are you indeed, and special Favourites of Heaven, if you have not only learn'd the great Truths of Christianity, and furnish'd your Heads with them, but have felt your Hearts powerfully impress'd with them betimes, and have this glorious Salvation begun within you. You have been awaken'd out of your mortal Slumbers, and been convinced of your sinful State, and your Danger of eternal Death; you have seen the Necessity of the pardoning Grace of God, and an universal Change in your own Natures, in order to prepare you for eternal Felicity; you have learn'd your own utter Insufficiency to make Satisfaction to divine Justice for your own Sins, and your Inability to sanctify your own Hearts, and to change them into Holiness; therefore you have *fled for Refuge to the Hope that is set before you*, and have found Righteousness and Grace in *Christ Jesus*. You have found the Blood of Atonement,

Atonement, and perfect Righteousness in him, to answer for your Guilt, and to justify you in the Sight of God, and the Power of divine Grace to work Repentance in your Hearts, to create your Souls anew, and form you to a divine Temper: You have felt the sweet and constraining Influence of the Love of a dying Saviour, and found your Hearts melted into holy and divine Affections, and impress with his sacred Image: You are become his sincere and devoted Servants, zealous for his Honour here on Earth, and in some Measure prepared for his Enjoyment in Heaven: Eternal Life is begun within you, and you have a Witness in your selves that the Gospel is true, even the Record which God has given of his Son, (*viz.*) *That eternal Life is to be found in Christ*, for you have found it in him, 1 John v. 10. *He that believes has the Witness in himself*; and I trust the Grace of God who has wrought this glorious Change in your Natures, and has begun this divine Salvation within you, *will carry it on, and fulfil it to the Day of the Lord.*

You have entered into this sacred Contest, and *are daily striving for the Mastery against the World, the Flesh and the Devil*; you have learn'd the Rules that belong to this holy Strife, and while you thus go on *to strive lawfully*, you may rejoice in Hope and Assurance of being crowned: You have

been early acquainted with the Laws of the Christian Race, and you have seen the heavenly Prize set before you in such a Light, as that you are allured to wish and to run for it, as your highest Hope and Blessedness: You have set your Faces toward Heaven in the Christian Path, and have travelled on thus far in the Way of Faith, Repentance and Holiness: Hold on your Way, maintain your Ground; the Crown is not far off, *the End of all Things is at Hand*; Jesus the Saviour, the Judge, and the Rewarder is at the Door; *See that no Man take your Crown.*



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